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PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

ROB ROLLSTONE.

By ALLYN DRAPER.



The mischief was done. Out of the barn a hundred Igorrotes came swarming, with such a rush that the boys did not have a ghost of a show. Isabella was seized and dragged away from them.

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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

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ROB ROLLSTONE

OR,

THE BOY GOLD HUNTERS OF THE PHILIPPINES

By **Allyn Draper**

CHAPTER I.

WHEN THE SOLDIERS CAME TO TOWN

Things never looked so dark for young Rob Rollstone as they did on the day when the soldiers came to town.

All Brownsburg was tremendously excited over the arrival of the 189th New York on its way to Philippine Islands, which halted at Brownsburg, a small town in the western part of New York, not far from Buffalo, because it had to—the engine broke down and the train was side-tracked, and for some unexplained reason remained at Brownsburg over night.

Rob Rollstone looked out the window of his step-father's store and wished he was going to the Philippines with the brave soldier boys; but he only dared to look for a moment, for it was dangerous to stop work in Captain Stutts' store unless one wanted to bring the proprietor down upon him "like a thousand of brick."

"You, Rob! Attend to your work there! You've got enough to do to get them cases emptied and put them canned goods on the shelves, without gaping out the window at the soldiers. Mind your business, now, and don't let me have to speak again!"

And Captain Stutts—that was Rob Rollstone's step-father—proceeded to pry up the lids of another case, and carefully knock out the crooked nails.

He was always very particular about these crooked nails, was the captain. He used to put them in with his stock—they helped out the weight, and for the fact that they were of no use to the purchaser, Captain Stutts did not care a rap.

"That boy is no earthly good to himself or anyone else, squire," growled Captain Stutts, when old Squire Reed came in for some tobacco. "He's lazy and impudent, and it costs more to keep him in clothes one year than he'd earn in five. Rob! wait on the squire. What do you stand there gaping for? Do you expect me to leave my work for every customer that comes in?"

Rob dropped work on the canned goods and hustled behind

the counter. If he had done this without being told to do it, Captain Stutts would have "jumped on him" just the same.

Fact was Captain Stutts was always "jumping" on the boy—always had been since the day he had married the pretty Widow Rollstone, Rob's mother, and once the belle of Brownsburg.

The boy did his best in his step-father's store, but it all went for nothing. To try to suit Captain Stutts was to attempt the impossible, and no one knew how hopeless a case it was better than Rob.

Squire Reed was served to tobacco, and as soon as he had gone Rob got it again.

"What did you give him tobacco out of that box for?" roared his step-father. "Don't you know that I want to work off those moldy goods first? Haven't I told you that times enough?"

Then it was a thump and a push, and a slap across the face and a parting kick, all of which poor Rob took with flushed cheeks and blazing eyes, but a silent tongue.

"Bear it for my sake, my boy," his mother had said over and over again. "He's very cruel to me, too, and it only makes it worse for Amy and myself when you complain."

Amy was Rob's younger sister, and although Captain Stutts had never yet raised his hand to her, he was harsh and stern in his treatment of the girl.

"I can bear anything for your sake and Amy's, mother," said Rob that evening, just before his step-father came in for supper, "but do you know it seems to me sometimes that it would be better for us all if I went away."

"No, no, Rob! Don't say that," replied the poor woman bitterly. "What should I do after you were gone?"

"Things would be easier then, mother. I am the bone of contention. Captain Stutts hates me. If I was out of the house he would have no one to growl at and——"

"Hush, my son! Hush! Here he comes!"

"Let him come," muttered Rob. "I know how all this will end—it will end in my being driven away from home."

It did seem as though Captain Stutts could never come into

his house, which was next door to the store, without beginning a growl.

He was growling now as he came down the three steps which connected the store with the house.

"What the mischief is the matter with you all?" he snarled. "Do you suppose I want to stay in there all night waiting to be called to supper? Get in there, you lazy beggar, and attend to your business or I'll jam your head against the wall!"

"Hooray! Hooray! Three cheers for the Yankee soldier boys!" some excited individual was shouting in the street. There was a bugle blowing and a drum beating. The soldiers who were in a temporary camp down by the depot were going through some sort of exercise apparently. How Rob wished he was with them! What a relief it would be to find himself out of that house forever and on his way to the Philippines!

But Rob was only eighteen, and although large for his age it was not very likely that any recruiting officer would accept him as a soldier; he had tried secretly and knew.

Customers came and customers went, and after a little, Captain Stutts came back into the store.

He walked over to the money drawer, pulled it out and counted the cash.

"There's a dollar short here!" he roared. "Rob, you young thief, you've been at this drawer! Hand over that dollar now, or I'll break every bone in your body! Hand it over, I say!"

This was a new departure. Never before had the boy been accused of stealing. He flushed up to the eyes and indignantly denied the charge.

"Don't talk to me!" roared the storekeeper. "I don't make mistakes. Hand over that dollar! Hand it over—quick!"

"I haven't touched your money!" said Rob, firmly. "I wouldn't soil my fingers with it! You can search me if you want to. You'd better do it if you don't believe my word."

Whack! Whack! Captain Stutts seized a barrel stave which happened to be lying behind the counter, and dealt the boy two stunning blows.

"Oh, John, don't strike him!" screamed Rob's mother, running up the steps from the dining-room. "It ain't possible that Rob can have stolen the dollar! You must have made a mistake!"

"Out of my way! I'll beat him within an inch of his life if he don't confess!" roared the captain. He had Rob by the collar then, and was using the barrel stave for all it was worth.

"Oh, Rob! Oh, what shall I do? Oh, say something to him to make him stop. Amy!" wailed the poor woman, wringing her hands.

"Don't you touch my brother! Let go of him! He's as honest as you are!" cried Amy, running in.

Captain Stutts did let go then, but it was only to turn on Amy and make a feint to strike her over the head with the barrel stave.

Perhaps he did not actually mean to do it, but Rob thought he did, and that was enough.

It was one thing to be kicked and cuffed himself, but quite another to see Amy come in for a share of his step-father's cruelty, and Rob with one bound sprang upon Captain Stutts and tried to wrench the barrel stave away.

He did not succeed. The captain caught him by the throat and threw him back against the counter.

"I'll kill you now!" he hissed. "This settles it! I——"

He got no further with his threats, for Rob had stood all that it was in human nature to bear.

Hauling off, he dealt Captain Stutts a stunning blow on the forehead, taking him in the left temple.

Down went the bully like a log, hitting his head against the counter as he fell and cutting it open.

Stunned and bleeding he lay on the floor at Rob's feet.

"Oh, Robby, Robby, what have you done?" wailed Mrs. Stutts. "You have killed him! You will be arrested! Run for your life, my boy! He is not dead! He's coming to his senses and there'll be more trouble! Go now while there's time!"

"I'm going!" replied Rob, bitterly. "I made up my mind that it would come to this a long time ago. Good-by, mother! but I will never return until I am rich enough to take you from this home forever—I've been driven away from home."

Embracing his mother and kissing his sister affectionately, Rob ran out the back way just in time to avoid being seen by several men who, attracted by the noise, came hurrying into the store.

It was just as he said. The long expected climax of his troubles was reached on the night when the soldiers came to town.

Rob Rollstone had been driven away from home.

CHAPTER II.

OFF FOR THE PHILIPPINES

Rob Rollstone had not one cent in his pocket when he ran away from home, and no more idea where he was going than the dead.

The boy had few friends in Brownsburg, for his step-father had only recently moved into the town, and as he hurried around through the back streets, Rob was thinking about going to Buffalo to look for a situation, and very likely he might have kept right on walking all night if he had not heard those hurried footsteps behind him—then things would not have turned out as they did.

Looking around, Rob saw two men running, and as one happened to be Mr. Crane the constable, he immediately jumped at the conclusion, which by the way, happened to be correct, that they were running after him.

"I've got to hide somewhere or the constable will catch me, sure," thought Rob, and he slipped through a broken fence and ran into the basement of the old last factory which had been abandoned many a year.

He had scarcely entered, when a dark figure sprang up and faced him.

"Look out for yourself!" cried a voice in the darkness. "I won't be taken! I'll do murder first! Don't you lay your hands on me!"

"Hello!" exclaimed Rob. "Who are you? Don't get excited. I ain't going to touch you. I've come in here to hide myself."

His eyes becoming used to the darkness he was able to make out a young man but little older than himself, wearing a soldier's uniform. Of course, he was one of the regiment. Of that there could be no doubt.

"Oh!" breathed the soldier, "I thought you were the sergeant. Say, don't give me away."

"What should I do that for? Who are you, anyhow? A deserter? By gracious, I believe that's just what you are."

Rob caught the fellow by the arm and drew him outside into the yard, a move that he felt perfectly safe in making, for he had heard the constable and his companion run past.

There was an electric-light pole just outside the fence, and as the glare of the lamp fell upon the soldier's face Rob started back in surprise.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "if I'm capable of judging how I look, you look just like me! This is strange."

"I'll be hanged if I don't," replied the soldier, staring at Rob.

It was a fact. The resemblance between the two was really remarkable, and yet it was only one of those strange coincidences which sometimes occur.

"What's your name?" asked Rob.

"I don't know why I shouldn't tell you," said the boy, sulkily. "It's Rob Ricketts. I'm from New York."

"There it is again. My name is Rob Rollstone. I ain't from New York, but I wish I was going where you are—to the Philippines."

"You do!" demanded the soldier, eagerly. "Do you really mean that?"

"Of course, I mean it. I'm just crazy to join the army; they wouldn't take me, but——"

"But they will!" exclaimed the boy. "I can fix that."

"How? What do you mean?"

"You want to go to the Philippines?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't. I've had enough of it already. Say, give me your clothes and you take mine. The boys will never know the difference between us. Come, is it a go?"

It was a strange proposition surely, but it happened to be made to just the right man.

Here was the chance for Rob. This cowardly fellow had been thrust upon him just in the nick of time.

"Fall in! Get in line there, you, Rob!" cried the sergeant of Company I, 189th New York, next morning shortly before four o'clock, for the train was just about to start, and Company I was now to go aboard.

Rob got in line the best he could, but it wasn't the Rob the sergeant thought he was addressing. Oh, no!

That particular Rob was just then riding on a coal car bound for New York with a lot of other tramps, but Rob Rollstone—our Rob—was on his way to the Philippines.

A soldier and not a soldier! This was Rob Rollstone's situation now, but nobody ever guessed that the exchange had been made, yet all the soldiers in Company I wondered what made surly Rob Ricketts, who had been disliked by everybody, suddenly turn over a new leaf and become the brightest, the wittiest, the most energetic fellow of them all.

Before everybody had disliked Rob, now everybody liked him, and his particular chum was Tony Trumper, who was assigned to the next bunk when the regiment went on board the steamer, City of Shanghai, at San Francisco.

Rob liked Tony immensely; they became good friends before the train reached Chicago, and they were like two brothers—brothers as they should be, not as they often are—when the steamer sailed away.

And yet Rob never told his secret even to Tony, for what was the use? If he let it out at all it would be sure to reach the ears of Captain Shields, and at least make a lot of disagreeable talk.

So Rob let well enough alone, and probably acted wisely in doing so. There was plenty to eat, and under a good captain Company I had nothing to complain of.

The voyage across the Pacific was like a revelation to Rob. If it had not been for those sad thoughts of his mother and Amy, Rob Rollstone would have most heartily voted that he was having the best time of his life.

"By gum, you two chaps is more like brothers than friends," said old Mike, the Malay, in his broken English, coming suddenly upon them one night when the voyage was almost over, and the boys were expecting at any moment to see the coast of Luzon loom up before them.

What was to come after the landing at Manila, Rob neither knew nor cared. Of course the 189th would join General Merritt's force, and perhaps there might be fighting in connection with the naval force of the gallant Dewey. The boys little guessed that the war with Spain was over, that Manila had already fallen into the hands of Dewey, and that there was nothing but guard duty ahead of them after all.

Not that all this makes much difference the way things

turned out. But to return to Mike the Malay, who was cook of the mess, and himself a Filipino, although many years had passed since he left his native's shore.

"What's the matter with you, Mike?" laughed Rob, leaning against the rail, with his hand on Tony's shoulder. "Anything wrong with a fellow having a chum like Tony, say?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" said the Malay. "It's all right, boys. I was only thinking of a friend I used to have in the old days over there."

And the Malay jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction in which the island of Luzon was supposed to lie.

"A long time ago, Mike?" asked Rob.

"Long time, long time," sighed the cook. "Oh, I was a fool in them days. I've seen the time when I could dig fifty dollars a day in gold on Mandave river. That's away up north of Manila in a part of the island where few ever go."

"Tell us about it," said Tony.

"What's the use? You'll never get there. It's in the Windo Mountains. You'd know it by the big rock which is shaped like a camel, which stands at the entrance to the gorge. After you pass that you come to where the river breaks through into another gorge, and there you find your gold, boys. Loads of it! Loads of it! Oh, don't I wish I was there! I might have been a millionaire if I hadn't been a fool."

Thus saying, old Mike the Malay shuffled off to the galley to look after the soup.

"Queer old card, ain't he, Rob?" said Tony, "but do you know, I think he understands what he's talking about, just the same."

"Upon my word, I believe he does," replied Rob, and that night he found himself dreaming of digging gold with Tony among the Windo Mountains. This was just the sort of business to suit Rob. He thought when he woke up that he wished that dream could come true.

There must have been some mistake in the calculations of the captain of the City of Shanghai.

Luzon was not sighted that night, nor all the next day. Late in the afternoon a violent cyclone struck the steamer, and tossed the boys in blue around terribly.

Tony was awfully seasick, and along about nine o'clock, when the wind was blowing eighty miles an hour, and such a sea was running that was awful to look at, the poor fellow met a terrible mishap. He fell overboard with a lurch of the vessel.

"Man overboard! Man overboard!" yelled a sailor, who happened to be standing near.

"Two men overboard! Two men overboard!" bawled the boatswain, seizing a hen-coop and tossing it into the sea.

"Who is it?" cried Captain Shields, running out of the smoking-room where he had been playing cards, "any of my men?"

"It was Tony Trumper," replied the boatswain. "He missed his balance and went over the rail, and young Rob Ricketts jumped in to save him! Ah, there's a friend for you, cap! But it's no use! They're both goners! No boat could live in this sea, and the old man will never let one be lowered, you mark my words."

The boatswain was right about the boat, but he was all wrong about Rob Ricketts, as the reader very well knows.

Rob Ricketts, that skulking deserter! Would he ever have thought of such a thing as jumping overboard into that awful sea to save the life of his friend?

Never! Never!

But Rob Rollstone did it—our Rob!

Not an instant did he hesitate when he saw poor Tony going.

"I'll save his life if it costs my own!" he thought, as he sprang over the rail and plunged into the sea.

CHAPTER III.

LOST ON LUZON

There was no better swimmer on the City of Shanghai than Rob Rollstone, and it is an open question if there was one half so good.

Rob's early life was spent on the shores of Lake Erie, and he learned to swim when he was a mere child, but all his skill in the water would have availed him very little in that awful sea if it had not been that Dame Fortune had taken him under her special care.

It was either that or the hen-coop which the boatswain threw overboard, which as luck would have it, happened to come Rob's way.

The brave boy seized it at a moment when he felt his strength going.

He could hear the hens giving a dying cackle within, and as he clutched the frail support desperately a white hand was raised above the wave close beside him.

Instantly Bob grasped it. He knew that he had got hold of Tony, and he clutched the hand with despairing grip.

He had need to hold hard, for at the same instant a mountainous wave swept over them.

Boy, hen-coop and hand were alike submerged, and for a moment it seemed a question of life or death.

But Rob held on bravely, and the wave passed, and there was Tony gasping and spluttering.

"Catch hold of the hen-coop!" roared Rob, scarcely able to make himself heard above the fury of the storm.

Speaking of the fury of storms, it must be remembered that tropical storms, especially those out in the Indian Ocean, come up quickly and go down quickly.

This one did. In less than half an hour there was no storm. The wind had died away completely, and the troubled sea had calmed down with its departure, and the stars had come out in all the glory of the tropical night.

This was all very well, but there were Rob and Tony still clinging to their hen-coop, and the City of Shanghai had vanished out of sight.

It seemed very hard to these two soldier boys—we may take the liberty of calling Rob a soldier, since he wore Uncle Sam's uniform—that no attempt had been made to rescue them from their awful plight.

"Tony," said Rob, calling across the hen-coop, "how do you feel now? Is your strength coming back? Do you think you can hold out till morning? Of course, it's our only chance."

"Go to," replied Tony, in his brief fashion. "It's either that or pass in my checks, and I don't think I'm ready to die just yet."

"It's tough, Tony."

"Blame tough, Rob! By gracious, I shall never forget you, though. I was a-goner that time if you hadn't caught my hand."

"Could I leave you to drown, Tony? I guess not."

"Seems not. Strange all the fellows had you down for a coward when we first started away from New York. I'd lick anyone who dared to say so now, you bet."

Rob laughed in spite of the desperate situation.

He was on the point of explaining to Tony, when the latter suddenly gave a great shout.

"Look, Rob! Look! A boat! A boat!"

And so it was! There, close beside them, was a long native canoe—canoe some writers like to call it, but the proper name is proa—floating idly on the waves, with no sign of life about it some hundred feet or more away.

"Hooray!" shouted Rob. "We're saved now! Hello on board the canoe! Hello!"

There was no response; no head was raised from the bottom of the canoe, as Rob half hoped.

"That thing is deserted," he said. "Hold on to the hen-coop, Tony. One of us has got to go for it, and I'm the one."

"Don't leave me, Rob! Don't leave me!" cried Tony in alarm. Tony was a miserable swimmer, and without Rob to back him up, probably would not have held on to the hen-coop five minutes when he first struck it in the storm.

"Nonsense!" cried Rob. "I can swim over there easy enough. Don't you see, Tony, the thing is passing. We've got to do it. Here goes."

And Rob let go his hold on the coop and struck out boldly for the proa.

Tony watched him, saw him make it; saw him climb in and heard his joyful shout when his job was done.

It was another case of Dame Fortune smiling. More than the mere finding of the proa, a great deal more.

For in the proa were several pairs of oars, bales of goods, a lot of old clothes, two splendid Winchester rifles and other things.

Who all this belonged to or how the proa came to be afloat, Rob Rollstone did not know then nor did he ever learn.

It was a mystery of the sea.

In less than five minutes Rob had the proa up alongside the hen-coop, and Tony came aboard.

He was wild with the thought of the great good fortune which had befallen them.

"Why, it's immense, Rob! Just immense!" he exclaimed. "If this thing had been made expressly for us it couldn't be better. See, here are provisions enough in this locker to last us a week, and look at the rifles and all these other things."

It is probable that the proa belonged to some itinerant trader among the coast plantations in North Luzon, for the bales contained dry goods and notions and knick-nacks of all sorts, and there were several suits of coarse clothes among the rest.

All through the night the boys sat and talked, congratulating themselves on their good fortune. It was warm and pleasant, they had laid aside their uniforms and put on dry clothes, being fortunate enough to pick out two suits which fitted them exactly.

Instead of Uncle Sam's soldiers, any one chancing to come across them now would have taken the boys for a pair of young Philippine planters.

"Morning came at last, and then Dame Fortune smiled again.

There in the distance lay the blue tops of a long range of mountains just rising above the horizon.

It was land, and if the captain of the city of Shanghai understood his business, it was probably the island of Luzon, the largest of the Philippines.

No attempt had been made to row during the night, for neither of the boys had the faintest idea in which direction to pull, but they went right at it now, and little by little the mountains grew more distinct, seeming to rise out of the sea, and after several hours' hard pulling they ran the proa into the mouth of a little inlet where a silver stream of water as clear as crystal came down over a towering rock.

"What a beautiful place!" exclaimed Rob, as he leaped ashore.

"Yes," growled Tony, "but just think of it! Here we are lost on Luzon, miles and miles from anywhere, most likely. Of course, I'm very thankful for being saved and all that, but just think of our miserable fate."

"Miserable fate be hanged!" cried Rob. "I don't care a rap if we are lost on Luzon. This sort of thing just suits me."

"Does, eh? Well, it don't me. I thought you wanted to be a soldier and fight for your country and all that sort of thing."

Rob burst out laughing.

"Why, the fact is, Tony, I never was a soldier," he said, and then at last Rob let out his secret, whereat Tony was duly surprised, and at first refused to believe it, and, indeed, it is rather doubtful whether he fully credited the strange story until he came to know Rob better later on.

A bath in the surf and a good breakfast—there were plenty of provisions in the proa—made Rob Rollstone feel like a new man.

The spirit of adventure was strong upon him, and had to be humored.

"I'm going up on top of that rock, Tony," he declared. "We'll hide our plunder in the bushes, take our rifles, and go on an exploring tour. We'll soon settle it whether we are lost on Luzon, and if we are I say again I don't care. We'll just keep on agoing, and are sure to come on some plantation or other in the end."

When they got on top of the rock they could see nothing but forest, and after they had tramped for an hour they had the satisfaction of knowing that they were lost on Luzon in good earnest, for the sun now rose high, and the boys were completely turned around.

"By gracious, I don't like this," growled Tony. "I wish we'd never left the shore."

"Tony," said Bob, "you're a growler, that's what you are. Let's take it easy, and—hello! it is not so bad as I thought. Do you hear that? We are coming out somewhere at last."

"That" was the barking of a dog, and it barked as though it meant business.

Suddenly there was a shot, and then another and another. The bark was turned to a yelp, and then all was still.

"That dog has been killed," said Rob. "Tony, I guess we'd better look to our rifles. We may have to use them before we get through."

"Why?" asked Tony, who always had some objection to offer. "We are not dogs, Rob. I don't know why anyone should shoot us."

"I was thinking of the insurgents," said Rob, "and I don't know, either, why the mere shooting of that dog should put them into my head."

"I thought the insurgents were only at Manila?"

"That isn't the way I understand it. The natives are up in arms all over the island, I believe. They've burned the plantations and killed the planters, and committed outrages everywhere. Upon my word, I shouldn't care to run across a band of them just now."

"Pooh! The Spaniards are just as bad. They love us Americans, don't they?"

"Of course, we shall take particular care to tell everyone of them we happen to meet that we are Americans. Hark! There you go again! By gracious, it's a woman's voice this time. She's calling for help!"

There was no mistaking the cry. It was a pleading cry—one of intense agony, and seemed to come from no great distance away.

"We're in on that game, sure, Tony!" cried Rob. "If there are any beautiful females to be rescued in these woods we are the boys to do it. Come on! We must find out what all this means."

They now hurried on through the forest, holding their rifles ready for instant action.

As they advanced they saw a great mass of smoke rising above the trees. Shouts were heard, and now and then a shot was fired.

There was no talking now, for both the boys felt that there was serious business on hand.

A few steps further and light broke among the dense mass of palms and other tropical trees.

Peering out Rob Rollstone found himself contemplating a startling scene.

A long plantation house standing in the midst of broad fields lay before him, but from the appearance of things it was not likely to stay there long.

Smoke was pouring from the windows and flames were bursting out of the roof.

Men in native dress were throwing out furniture and various articles, and on the ground was a crowd of chocolate-colored fellows, some wearing tattered uniforms, others half naked, some armed with rifles, others with bows and arrows and spears.

They were dancing and quarreling over the possession of the goods which their comrades were throwing out of the windows of the burning house.

"By gracious, Tony, this is a good time for disappearing!" whispered Rob, and very likely he would have taken his own advice and retreated, but just at that moment a young and beautiful girl came hurrying out of the house, leading by the hand an aged man with venerable locks, and long white beard.

She shouted something in Spanish and motioned away the insurgents—for such they were—with a queenly wave of her hand.

Evidently her intention was to make for the woods, but before she had gone ten steps, a Filipino wearing a resplendent uniform rushed out of the house, and drawing a revolver fired at the old man, shooting him dead at the girl's feet.

With a wild cry the girl ran, the native officer springing after her.

In a moment he would have had her at his mercy if Rob and Tony had not been there to prevent.

"Now, then, Tony, here's work for us!" cried Rob, springing out from the forest.

"Stand back!" he shouted. "Don't dare to come nearer. I'm here for business! I'll defend this girl with my life!"

CHAPTER IV.

ATTACKED BY IGORROTES.

"Keep back! Keep your hands off this lady! Don't you touch her, I say!"

This was what Rob Rollstone shouted out to the Filipino officer, but what the fellow yelled in return Rob could not understand. He could not have made anything out of it if it had been in Spanish, but as it happened to be in one of the native dialects it was a great deal worse.

But Rob found means of communicating his ideas to the Filipino all right enough. He struck out from the shoulder, took the fellow under the jaw and sent him sprawling on his back.

"Fly into the forest!" breathed the girl. "Quick! Nothing else will save us!"

She pulled away and ran into the woods, Rob and Tony following, but not before the latter had tumbled over two of the Filipinos in the most effective style.

A shower of shots came after them; the air rang with wild shouts of these savage men; all this mingling with the crackling of the flames from the burning building made confusion worse confounded and spurred the boys on.

The girl ran with them—in fact, she led the way.

"You have saved me from a fate worse than death," she exclaimed. "That man Gwando, my father's murderer, would have forced me to become his wife. I'd sooner die. Boys, will one of you give me your revolver? Thank you. I shall never forget what you have done for me. If we are captured I kill myself, but to return, never! Never! Oh, my dear old home! Gone! Gone! Gone! All gone forever! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

It was dreadful to listen to her! The poor girl did not seem

to know what she was saying; her voice was choked with her tears.

"But she knows where she is going, all right," whispered Tony to Rob. "See, we are coming out on the beach, and we haven't gone half as far as we came."

It was, indeed, quite evident that the girl knew the forest and all its windings—knew it far better than their pursuers, whose shots grew fainter and fainter behind them.

They had now struck into a distinct path leading through the tangle toward the ocean; the breakers could be heard dashing on the beach, and in a few moments they were at the water's edge.

The girl gave one look around and threw up her hands with a gesture of despair.

"Gone! Gone!" she exclaimed. "There is no hope now! Leave me, boys. You can do nothing more. Leave me to my fate."

"What is it?" demanded Rob. "You expected to find something here—was it a boat?"

"Yes, yes! They have taken it away. Go! Go now! Don't you hear Gwando coming? He will kill you both."

"Let him come. We can do some of that, too, and if you want a boat, we've got one. I don't believe it is very far away."

And Rob hastily explained who they were and how they came to drop so suddenly on the scene.

Before he was half through talking they were running along the beach at full speed, and before they had gone far they saw Gwando and a band of insurgents come out of the forest and start after them.

"Faster—faster!" cried Tony. "We can't be very far from the boat now."

As a matter of fact, they were only a very short distance, for the next turn of the shore brought them in sight of the cave, where they landed.

Quick action followed. Gaining the canoe, they put out to sea without an instant's delay.

A shower of shots, mingled with the whizzing arrows, was the result of this move.

It was a trying situation for the boys. When they spoke to her she did not answer. In fact, her grief seemed to be overwhelming. Soon they were far enough away from the beach to be safe from all danger.

Gwando and his gang ceased firing, and for some moments stood watching them. Then Rob saw the officer shake his fist at him and turn back into the forest, followed by all his men.

"There they go! That ends the chapter," said Tony, in a low voice. "Rob, what are we going to do?"

"Don't ask me," replied Rob. "We must pull along shore, I suppose, until we come to some settlement."

"Where we can leave her?"

"Hush! Not so loud. She'll hear."

Suddenly the girl raised her head and looked at Rob. "There!" she exclaimed, "I've had my cry out, and won't annoy you with my grief any more. Boys, I thank you. Now let the past drop. You say you were lost overboard from a United States war vessel and are American soldiers. I am an American also. My early life was spent in Louisiana. My name is Isabella Esquivedo. Ten years ago my poor father came to the Philippines and settled at the place where you found me. We prospered and everything went well with us until the natives rose up against the Spaniards. Since then we have had our share of trouble—more than our share—but it is no use talking about it. I have an uncle who runs a big plantation up the Massu river. Take me there and he will reward you well."

"We will certainly do anything we can for you," said Rob.

"But of course you understand that we know nothing of the country. You will have to tell us what to do."

"It is nothing so difficult. The Massu river empties into the sea not five miles from here. It won't be much trouble to row that far, will it, Rob Rollstone? I think I've got your name right, but I was so confused when you told me that—"

"Oh, the name is all right," broke in Rob. "I'm Rob Rollstone, and this is Tony Trumper. We'll do anything in the world we can for you, miss. A five-mile row is mighty little, and we are serving ourselves while we are serving you."

So the boys pulled on, and as the canoe shot forward Isabella told more of her story; how Gwando had fired the plantation house out of revenge for her repeated refusal to become his wife, and how her father had been shot down in cold blood while trying to defend her. The boys were good listeners and it evidently eased her mind to talk.

All this time they had kept well in toward the shore, so as not to miss the entrance to the river. The country lying back from the beach was a dense tropical tangle with no sign of habitation; high mountains towered beyond.

Isabella explained that there were few plantations in this section. That belonging to Senor Esquivedo, her uncle, was in as lonely a situation as her father's, while the nearest town was thirty miles south of the mouth of the Massu.

If Rob had consulted his own ideas he would have tried to work his way to this town, but as it was a little before twelve o'clock they entered the mouth of a shallow river—a creek it would have been called in America—which Isabella declared was the Massu.

"Two miles more, Rob Rollstone, and we shall be safe!" she exclaimed. "You shall never regret this. My uncle, like my poor father, is a firm friend of the Americans. He will find means to forward you to Manila, where you can join your regiment again."

"I don't know that I care much whether I join the regiment or not," answered Rob. "What would suit me better would be to explore this wonderful country. I'd like to go straight across the island and see all there is to be seen."

"You don't know what you are talking about?" said the girl. "Do you know that there are savage tribes in the middle of the island who never even heard of Spain, and who think that they still own and rule the land?"

"Never heard of that."

"Of course not. Then right on the coast between this and Manila there are the dwarfs. Did you ever hear of them?"

"Never; I'm afraid you will think that my education has been neglected, but I never did."

"It is not strange. The Philippines are but little known. Then beside the dwarfs there are the Igorrotes and the Moros, both very savage tribes. Rob Rollstone, you Americans have very little idea what you have undertaken when you talk about conquering the Philippines."

"Well, I guess if Spain can run the islands, we can," said Tony. "We Yankees don't take a back seat for anyone—oh, no!"

"The Yankees are a great people," she said, "and there is scarcely a plantation owner on the island who will not welcome them as rulers. But I do not exaggerate the danger a bit. Even now we are liable to be attacked by the Igorrotes at any moment, and my uncle's plantation is not two miles away. No one goes unarmed in this part of the country, and—"

Whiz! came an arrow right between Rob and Tony. Whiz! Whiz! Whiz! Three others followed, and then it was a perfect shower.

"Down! Down!" cried Isabella. "We are attacked by the Igorrotes! Down in the bottom of the boat if you value your lives!"

CHAPTER V.

SWALLOWED UP BY AN EARTHQUAKE.

It was perfectly natural under the circumstances that Rob Rollstone and Tony should lose no time in obeying Isabella's very emphatic command.

There on the river bank were as many as a hundred of the Igorrotes naked to the waist with their long black hair streaming; they were shouting to each other and shooting with their long bows at the boat. It was rather a discouraging prospect, to say the least.

"I'm afraid we are going to be captured," said Isabella, speaking with great calmness considering the circumstances. "The natives have risen everywhere. To be captured by the Igorrotes means death!"

"Keep pulling, Tony! Keep pulling!" cried Rob. "Just let me get my hand on that rifle! We'll soon see if we are going to be captured or not!"

"Don't think of sitting up in the boat!" cried Isabella. "The arrows of the Igorrotes are poisoned! To be hit with one is to die a horrible death!"

"Somebody's going to get hit," said Rob, boldly sitting up and leveling the rifle, which was a fine Winchester.

Then utterly heedless of the arrows which flew past him on both sides, but never once even grazed his body, he blazed away, using up every cartridge with great effect.

Four of the Igorrotes dropped, and the others, amazed and terrified at this rapid firing, the like of which they had never seen before, took to their heels and plunged into the forest.

The danger was past, and the boys ran the canoe up the river at full speed.

Isabella was lost in admiration at Rob's bold act.

"How brave you are!" she exclaimed. "But I know you Americans, Rob Rollstone. Nothing can stand up before them. Ah, if you had only been at the plantation when Gwando attacked us! Poor father might still be alive."

Her tears flowed afresh at the recollection, but she had need to lay aside all such weakness, for worse was still to come.

The two miles from the mouth of the Massu to Senor Esquivado's plantation had now almost been covered. Soon they rounded a bend in the river, and instead of the big house, with its spacious barns and outbuildings, which Isabella had gone to great pains to describe to the boys, they saw before them a heap of smoking ruins, with not one sign of life about the place.

It was a terrible shock to Isabella. They landed and wandered about among the ruins; the poor girl was in deep despair.

"It's the Igorrotes!" she said. "They have been here and done this. Aguinaldo's uprising has changed everything and stirred the native tribes up to murder. No doubt my uncle had warning, and was able to escape with his family, for he was always good to the natives, and had many friends among them; but what are we to do now?"

"I think the best thing we can do is to pull down the shore to the town you spoke of," replied Rob. "That is unless there is some other place nearer here where you can go."

"There is none. The country back of this is forest through to the Mandero river, and beyond that lie the Windo Mountains, where the wild tribes and the dwarfs live."

"And the gold grows!" cried Tony, his eyes opening to their widest extent. "The Mandero river, the Windo Mountains, Rob! You remember? This is the country Mike the Malay talked about, sure!"

"There's plenty of gold in the Mandero river country. I've heard my father say so many times," said Isabella. "But

what are we to do? If it is to return the sooner we start the better; no good can come of remaining here."

"We'll go now," replied Rob, "but see, there's one building still standing down by the river bank. Wouldn't it be well to have a look inside there first?"

"That's the tobacco barn," said Isabella. "It's possible someone may be hiding there, but it isn't likely. However, we'll go and see."

They little guessed as they walked toward the barn that a hundred eyes were peering out at them between the cracks of the loose boards.

Rob was in advance, and seeing that the door was but loosely fastened, he threw it open, and all in an instant the mischief was done.

Out of the barn a hundred naked Igorrotes came swarming, and came with such a rush that the boys did not have a ghost of a show.

Isabella was seized and dragged away from them. Rob tried to rescue her, and was knocked senseless with one blow of a heavy club, wielded by a big, ugly-looking Igorrote.

As for Tony, one of the savages caught him under the arms from behind, and tossed him upon the shoulders of another as easily as if he had been a baby. The Igorrote caught Tony by the legs and went trotting off into the forest with him, and Rob as soon as he recovered his senses, which he did a moment later, was served in the same way.

Here was a pretty predicament. Rob Rollstone felt as if he could tear out the long black hair of the Igorrote who carried him with a right good will, but to attempt anything of this sort meant death, and as a matter of fact it was all that Rob could do to hold on to his unsteady perch, and Tony was in exactly the same fix.

As for Isabella, the boys as they looked back could see nothing of her. Alive she might be, but Rob thought it far more likely that she had been recognized as one of the Esquivado family and was dead.

Not a word was spoken as the Igorrotes moved on through the forest, which was here open as a gentleman's park, being entirely free from underbrush.

Thus it was easy for the boys to avoid the limbs of the trees, which they otherwise might have found great difficulty in doing.

For more than an hour this strange journey continued, and except for an occasional grunt of the leader, which seemed to indicate the direction to be taken, there was no word spoken.

It was terribly fatiguing for the boys. Poor Rob was almost dead, and he felt that it would be just impossible to balance himself on the naked shoulder of his bearer any longer, when all at once they came out upon the bank of a river, with lofty mountains towering behind it.

It was fearfully hot and close; there did not seem to be a breath of air stirring. The sky wore a sickly greenish look, which, in the tropics, almost always precedes some terrible convulsion of nature.

The leader of the Igorrotes seemed to understand this, for he gave a great shout and pointed upward, and all began to run for the river at top speed.

For the first time Rob and Tony found themselves together, but there was no chance to talk. It was hold on for dear life, or drop off the shoulders of their bearers.

A perfect panic seemed to have seized the savages. Those in advance jumped into the river and stayed there, while those in the rear ran for the water with redoubled speed.

Looking around Rob saw that the whole surface of the ground was broken and seamed with what in the Far West are termed barrancas—great cracks in the ground—over which the bearers went leaping, shaking the boys up terribly. The

idea seemed to be to pass these cracks and gain the river before something happened; what that something was became plain a moment later on.

The two bearers were just approaching a narrow crack, when all at once a heavy, rumbling sound was heard, and the ground seemed to rise up under their feet.

A terrible cry came from the men in the water. Those who had yet to gain the river went tumbling about in every direction. Some fell flat, others stumbled into the rifts.

Rob and Tony, clutching their bearers by the hair, held on desperately, when as quick as a flash, a broad crack at least ten feet wide opened right before them with a second and most fearful shock.

It was an earthquake—such an earthquake as is known only in the islands of the Indian ocean.

Leaping desperately the two bearers tried to clear the break and did it, but it was at the expense of the boys who were tumbled off their backs without ceremony.

Down into the rift Rob and Tony went flying, and the crack closed upon them as they fell.

CHAPTER VI.

ROB FINDS A TEN-POUND NUGGET AT THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE.

Everyone who knows anything about the Indian islands is well aware that earthquakes are of such frequent occurrence there as to excite little comment, unless they happen to be particularly severe.

In the island of Java, which lies at no great distance from the Philippines, a whole mountain vanished in a night, some fifteen years ago, and the sea now flows calmly above the place where it once reared its lofty head.

But Rob and Tony knew nothing of all this, and when they landed in a mass of shifting sand in total darkness they had little thought of the danger they had escaped.

They were alive and unharmed, they had escaped the Igorrotes, and that was enough.

For Rob to scramble to his feet, shake himself, call to Tony and discover that they were both unharmed, took about half a minute, and then he began to wonder where they had dropped to and why they were not dead.

"It's a cave," groaned Tony. "An underground cave, that's what it is. The earthquake cracked the roof and let us in, and by gracious we are going to stay in. Oh, Rob, we are buried alive!"

"Who says so?" replied Rob. "Who's going to give up first go, eh? Not I, and don't you forget it. This is a good year for adventures, Tony, and we are getting our share of them, but I'll believe we are buried alive when I know it, and not before. Isn't that light near there—say?"

"Where? I see nothing."

"Where I'm pointing."

"Thunder, Rob! I can't see you! Gee! isn't this a busting old experience! To be swallowed up by an earthquake and still be alive!"

"Never mind about that, Tony. Don't you see that bright spot? Is it imagination to my eyes?"

"I tell you I can't see anything."

"Give me your hand, then, and I'll help you. There, so! Just in the direction you are pointing. You must see it now."

"I do," said Tony, with a great sigh of relief; "there is a light over there."

"I thought so. Well, let's go for it. It's a ray of hope anyhow."

They hurried on through the darkness, keeping their eyes fixed on the light.

It was hard walking on account of the sand, but other than that the way was not rough. As they continued to advance

the light grew brighter and brighter. They must have walked about half a mile when they saw the end of the cave before them, and this started them off on the run.

"Out at last!" cried Rob. "What did I tell you, Tony? While there's life there's hope, and the earthquake served us a good turn after all. Great Scott! Look at this place! Did you ever see such rocks!"

Out in broad daylight now the boys found themselves standing at the entrance to a deep gorge, which penetrated a mountain so lofty that they had to bend their heads far back to see the top. The place was a perfect basin, shut in on all sides, with no apparent way to get out.

In point of fact the cave was nothing but a continuation of the gorge, roofed over and lying beyond the great sink, as the circular inclosure might be termed.

Running out of the mouth of the gorge was a small, but rapid stream of water as clear as crystal which turned aside, and instead of entering the cave, passed in under the rocks and disappeared.

"What a singular place," exclaimed Tony. "Say, Rob, we must have passed under that river. These are the mountains we saw on the other side."

"It certainly looks that way. By gracious, this is a singular business all around. Remember what that poor girl was saying almost the last thing before the Igorrotes rushed out on us?"

"Saying about what?"

"Didn't she tell us that the forest that lay behind the plantation house ended at the Mandero river, and that the Windo Mountains lay right beyond?"

"By gracious, she did, Rob, and that's right!"

"Remember what old Mike said about his gold mine. There was a gorge and a rock which was shaped like——"

"Like a camel! Rob! It can't be, but there it is!"

Tony pointed to the big mass of rock which formed the beginning of the right-hand wall of the gorge.

It was shaped exactly like a camel; there was the head, the long neck and the hump, and even the legs seemed to be indistinctly marked out as the boys stood gazing at it.

"That's what's the matter," said Rob. "My eyes lighted on it as soon as we came out of the cave. I wonder, Tony, if it can possibly be the same?"

"I don't see why not if these are really the Windo Mountains," replied Tony, "but what's bothering me is how we are going to get out of this hole."

"One thing sure we'll never get out the same way we came in," laughed Rob, who was so elated at this startling discovery that just then it seemed to make but little difference to him whether they ever got out or not.

But there must have been a way out, for at that very moment two naked Igorrotes armed with bows and arrows were stealing down the gorge.

They stopped at the base of the camel rock and peered around at the boys, who, all unconscious of their presence, were still gazing about.

"I tell you what it is, Tony," remarked Rob. "I propose to have a good hunt for gold here before we make any attempt to get out. I've always heard say that the beds of streams were the places to look and—why, what in the world! Look, Tony, look! What do you call this but gold?"

Rob had picked up a dirty piece of stone, weighing perhaps ten pounds, right at the mouth of the cave. The dirt fell away as he raised it, and from all sides there was a bright yellow gleam.

It was a big ten-pound nugget; nearly pure gold! Tony flung up his hat and shouted.

"Luck is with us!" cried Rob. "A few more like this and we are right in it!" and he began looking down in the sand

for another nugget, whereas if he had looked out toward the camel rock he would have seen the two Igorrotes in the act of drawing their bows.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

Whiz, whiz! Two arrows went whirring past Rob Rollstone and Tony.

It would seem as if the Igorrotes of Luzon were poor shots, for neither did the least damage—on the contrary, they did good, in attracting the boys' attention to the two savages at the camel rock.

The instant he saw them, Rob let fly the ten-pound nugget, which struck one of the Igorrotes on the shoulder, knocking him down. The boys had no ammunition for their revolvers, which the natives had overlooked, as in the previous fights both had exhausted their bullets uselessly.

"Quick! Let 'em have it, Tony! Stone 'em back!" cried Rob, as the other savage, with a fiendish yell, sent an arrow flying.

It was his last shot. The boys lost no time in sending a shower of stones at the camel rock, and the Igorrotes vanished, but Rob did not rest here. Filling his pockets with the stones which lay scattered everywhere among the sand, he and Tony made a rush for the rock, entirely regardless of any danger which might lie behind it.

"Drive 'em back! Drive 'em back!" shouted Rob; "our only chance is to show fight."

There was no fighting to be done then. The Igorrotes were in full retreat.

They were running up the gorge along the bed of the stream. The man Rob hit with the nugget seemed to be seriously injured. His companion was supporting him as they ran. In a moment they were lost around a turning in the gorge and when the boys got around the corner they were nowhere to be seen.

"That's the talk!" cried Rob, all out of breath. "They may come again and again, but we'll fight them every time. Hello, Tony, what have you caught on to? A bow as true as I live."

"That's what is it," said Tony, triumphantly. "It's the Igorrote's bow. He dropped it when you gave him the nugget."

"If we only had arrows we might be able to do something. I bet I could shoot straighter than those fellows any day in the week."

"We've got the arrows they fired at us anyway," laughed Tony. "If they come again we can use those for all they are worth."

"They'll do to practice with; but say, Tony, we've learned one thing by this attack."

"What?"

"There's a way out of this hole."

"Evidently."

"First thing we want to do is to find it."

"It would be a pious idea, but I say, the first thing to be done is to find our nugget. We want to hold on to that."

"We'll go back and look it up," said Rob. "Of course we don't want to lose it, but all the same we want to know all there is to be known about the place; unless we intend to starve to death we've got to get out, and that mighty quick."

They now hurried back, and had no difficulty in finding the nugget.

Rob buried it in the sand, and then they returned to the gorge, following it up about a quarter of a mile, where it came to a sudden end.

A vast wall of rock blocked further progress. At the base the stream came rushing out through a low, narrow opening.

There was no possibility of scaling the rock on either side, so the only conclusion that the boys were able to come to was that the Igorrotes must have gone in through the opening following the stream.

Rob studied the situation and determined to try this plan himself.

The opening was about three feet high and perhaps six in width; the depth of the stream was perhaps two feet, making about five feet of head room. By stooping it would be possible to walk in under the rocks. If they wanted to advance there was no other way.

"We may as well make a try for it, Tony," said Rob. "Of course we can't stay here."

"Yes, and run the risk of getting a poisoned arrow into us before we've gone ten feet, or of being killed in some other way," growled Tony. "However, I suppose it has got to be done. Going to try it with your clothes on, Rob, or without?"

"Without. What's the use of getting wet when you don't have to?"

"To go naked will give the poisoned arrow a better chance, that's all."

"Let it come. We are taking chances."

"That's what! I suppose we may as well face the music," said Tony, beginning to take off his shoes.

They stripped, tied their clothes up in two tight bundles, and then stepped boldly into the stream, passing in under the rocks.

In an instant it was pitch dark; they crept along over rough stones, expecting every moment to hear the twang of an Igorrote's bow, or have one of those dreadful savages jump on them; but instead of this they were treated to a genuine surprise.

All at once light broke ahead, and they passed out into a scene of beauty which brought loud exclamations from both.

They had entered another sink, but a very different place from the one they left behind.

It was a level plain, encircled on all sides by towering rocks, with mountain peaks rising above high into the clouds. The distance around this inclosure was perhaps a mile, and the place was a perfect paradise; there was a bit of forest and a stretch of meadows through which the stream ran. On the opposite bank was what looked like an orchard, strange trees grew in rows and some were laden down with fruit. Birds sang in the woods and fish leaped in the stream, while right ahead of them, standing at the edge of the woods, was a log hut with a patch of ground, inclosed by a fence, surrounding it. No wonder the boys were excited as they gazed upon this charming spot.

"We are all right now, Tony," said Rob. "This will be some settler's cabin. Of course no Igorrotes would build a house like that."

"Don't know," replied Tony. "Best thing we can do is to go and see."

They hurried forward and approached the hut, expecting every moment to see some sign of life.

But they saw nothing of the sort. Profound silence reigned in this peaceful valley.

When they reached the hut they saw at a glance that the place had been long deserted. The garden was all overgrown, and trailing vines had worked their way over the fence, and up over the logs, covering even the doorway in such a tangled mass that the boys had to cut them away before they could enter.

The door was locked, but a slight push was all that was needed to force it, for the lock dropped away from the rotting wood, revealing a snug room furnished with tables, chairs, a cook stove and many comforts. There were dishes upon a dresser, and pots and pans in a closet. Two rifles hung

against the wall, and there was a handsome deer's head mounted on a board fastened above them. Taken altogether, the hut was as snug a little box as one could ask to see.

Beyond this room was another where sleeping-bunks had been built against the wall. A ladder led to a loft overhead in which was stored a lot of empty boxes and other traps, but in all their search the boys found nothing to indicate who the owner of the hut might have been. Dust lay deep everywhere, and it was perfectly evident that the hut had not been occupied for a long time.

"Tony," said Rob, "there's no use talking; we've struck a bonanza, but it's just as sure as shooting that those two Igorrotes never came in here."

"Then where did they go?" asked Tony, who seemed never to tire of staring around the hut and calling attention to new treasures.

"Give it up."

"All right. I won't give this place up in a hurry, Rob Rollstone. We can live here just as long as it suits us. What's the matter with our turning gold hunters? Blame me if I don't believe this is Mike the Malay's camp. What's the matter with our stopping right here till we've made our pile?"

"Nothing; you've spoken my mind, Tony. That's just what I propose to do."

"Unless the Igorrotes drive us out."

"They won't. We've a rifle apiece now, and I've no doubt we shall find a supply of cartridges somewhere. Let the Igorrotes come, we'll be ready for them and—by thunder, I believe they are upon us now!"

A frightful yell rang out behind the hut, and the boys saw a tall figure in a fur coat run past the window.

Jumping on the table, Rob hastily took down the rifles.

"I don't suppose they are loaded, Tony," he cried, "but we've got to defend ourselves. Perhaps these will help to scare those fellows off."

Someone was crashing through the vines and making for the door. Rob and Tony planted themselves before the opening, and waited the enemy's approach.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREAT STRIKE IN THE CREEK.

The boys had but an instant to wait before the door was darkened by something worse than an Igorrote—something which sent the cold chills through both.

It was no man!

Instead there stood an enormous orangoutang, fully six feet high; his ugly face was twisted into a mass of wrinkles as he snapped and snarled, showing a double row of fearful teeth.

Rob declared after it was all over that he had never been so badly frightened in all his life, but however this might be, he certainly did not show it, for he leveled his rifle, taking deliberate aim at the breast of the big ape, and pulled the trigger on a venture.

There was a loud report and the orangoutang with a fearful yell dropped dead.

"By time, you've killed him, Rob!" cried Tony, amazed at this complete success.

"That's what I set out to do," replied Rob, triumphantly. "Hold on a minute, Tony; are there any more big monkeys out there?"

None came, and after a moment the boys ventured to approach the dead brute.

"There's a good winter coat for someone," declared Rob. "Gracious, but ain't he a buster! You know what he is, I suppose?"

"A big ape, ain't he, Rob?"

"An orangoutang."

"Gosh! You don't say! I wouldn't want him to get hold of me, then. If there's any more of his kind in the woods, I think I'll keep out."

"More than likely there are. Our rifles are loaded, though, and that's one comfort. Probably there's other game in the woods, too, and we want to find out where the cartridges are kept if we can."

They not only discovered a good supply of cartridges, but many other useful things before the day was out. The hut proved to be a perfect storehouse of wealth in the way of such articles as were needed for their comfort.

And in the way of provisions the valley was just as rich. Potatoes were growing in the garden, and the trees in the "orchard" were loaded down with several varieties of strange fruit, all of which were certainly very delicious to eat, and produced no ill effects.

Besides these things the river was full of fish, and in the meadow along the edge of the woods hundreds of wild hens were found. They seemed to be the common barn-yard fowl, and Rob felt, no doubt, that they were the descendants of broods, originally belonging to the owner of the hut.

Rob shot two, and they were cooked for dinner along with a big fish, which Tony caught in the stream.

Of course, the boys kept a sharp lookout for the Igorrotes, and that night, while one slept, the other watched, but both might just as well have gone into the bunks and stayed there, for the night passed peacefully, and there was no alarm.

"Now, then, Tony," said Rob next morning, after they had eaten a good breakfast, "we want to begin our gold hunting. I've made a discovery which shows that we are on the right track."

"What's that?" demanded Tony, his eyes opening wide.

"There's another hut up the stream just at the point where it comes out of the woods."

"Hello! You left me alone in this hut exposed to all sorts of danger while I slept?"

"Danger nothing! There are no Igorrotes here or we should have heard from them before this. Come and see what I have found."

Rob led the way up the stream into the woods and there stood a small shed close to the bank.

"What's this?" cried Tony. "It looks like a country cow-house."

"Open the door and look in," said Rob. Tony did so and found inside several tin pans, old and rusty, a curiously shaped open box with a sieve at one end, spades, picks, shovels and various other tools.

"There's your mining outfit," said Rob. "There's no doubt about it, whoever built that hut ran a gold mine here. Probably he made his pile, and pulled out leaving all his goods behind him."

"Mike, the Malay," exclaimed Tony.

"Not likely. Mike may have worked here, but it was probably long before the hut was built. It don't make much difference who it was, though, I'm going to take a hack at it now."

Then followed the most memorable hour of Rob Rollstone's life.

Our hero had heard enough about gold digging to know in a general way how to go at it.

Pulling off his stockings and shoes Rob waded out into the stream and began scooping up the sand in his hands.

In the first handful he saw bright, shining specks of yellowish metal.

"Gold, Tony! Gold!" he cried. "Get out the pans! We must go at this thing right. Get out the rocker, too."

"What's the rocker?" asked Tony. "Say, Rob, are you sure it's gold?"

"Can't be sure yet. I think so, though."

"And the rocker?"

"Don't you know what a rocker is?"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do."

"Then that's where your early education has been neglected. The box with the wire in it is what I want."

Tony ran into the shed and brought it out, and by Rob's direction a couple of pans came with it, after which Tony pulled off his shoes and stockings and came into the stream, too.

They scooped up a big lot of the sand and piled it on the bank. Then, putting a little in the rocker, Rob washed it out, the water and sand running through the sieve, leaving behind quite a little deposit of the yellow flakes, which seemed to be heavier than the sand, and promptly settled down into a depression in the floor of the rocker.

Again they tried it, and still again.

Each time it was the same. The sand disappeared, and the yellow stuff remained behind.

The third time Rob spied a small oblong nugget as soon as he began to wash.

"Hooray, Tony!" he shouted. "We've made a big strike! It's gold—pure gold!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE IN THE WALL.

The biggest kind of good fortune came to Rob Rollstone and his friend Tony Trumper during that week.

The bed of the creek was literally full of gold.

Everywhere they tried it the result was the same. There was plenty of flake gold at each panning. Nuggets were scarce, but now and again they got one; by hard, patient work the boys worked out about twenty pounds of gold by the end of the week.

"Figure it at eighteen dollars an ounce, Tony, and you have four thousand and three hundred dollars—a pretty good pile for so short a time."

"No," said Tony, who was always ready with his objections.

"No, what? What do you mean?"

"You haven't figured it right—it's more."

"Who says so? I know how to figure, my son."

"I ain't your son, and you can't figure for a cent, if that's what you make it. Sixteen times twenty are three hundred and twenty, and eighteen times that——"

"Hold on, Tony. How many ounces to a pound?"

"Sixteen, to be sure."

"Avoirdupois, but we don't weigh gold that way."

"How then?"

"Troy weight."

"Pshaw! I forgot. I knew that, too, when I went to school. Twelve ounces to the pound, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Then you are right. Well, it's a good haul, and we must go through the mountain and fetch our nugget. Add that to the rest, and we'll have more than if we'd have worked for Uncle Sam for five years."

Altogether the outlook was most flattering, and the boys found themselves so comfortable that there was no thought of making a move. Indeed, Rob declared himself perfectly content to remain there for a year.

The next day was Sunday, and the boys determined to observe it and do no work.

There was no guard mounting now—it hardly seemed necessary, although they took care to lock the door in case another orangoutang should take it into his head to pay them a visit.

It was a late breakfast that morning, but a good one. There was fish and fried chicken and baked potatoes and coffee.

The latter was discovered in a box in the loft. There was a lot of it, and with care Rob thought it would last for months.

After breakfast the boys started out for a walk, for Rob was anxious to explore the valley thoroughly.

"Let's follow the mountain wall all the way around, Tony," he said. "If there is any outlet to this place we ought to know it; this is a good time to explore."

"But that will take us into the woods," objected Tony. "I don't like that."

"Pshaw! What are you afraid of?"

"Orangoutangs!" replied Tony, with a grin. "Never mind. Come on. I ain't afraid."

They started at the outlet of the stream and followed the towering walls around over the meadow, entering the woods at last.

It was all the same. Everywhere the rocks were absolutely inaccessible. They rose perpendicularly to a fearful height.

The woods were alive with monkeys, which leaped from branch to branch, chattering wildly and making faces at the boys, but they saw no signs of the giant ape.

As they were pushing their way through a thick tangle, at the base of the rocks, a deer leaped across their path.

It was a chance for a shot, which Rob lost no time in embracing.

Quick as lightning the boy's rifle was at his shoulder, and the deer came down.

"There's fresh meat for you, Tony!" cried Rob. "By gracious, I didn't believe I could do it. We've got to get this thing back to the hut."

"Leave it where it is, and we'll come and take it later," said Tony. "I'm anxious to push on to the stream and see how it gets through these rocks."

Rob readily agreeing to this, they continued on through the forest until the stream was reached.

It was more open here, but the rocks were just as high. There was no apparent opening for the stream, though. The water came welling up out of the earth in a most singular fashion. At the base of the rocks it had formed itself into a broad pool, out of which the stream ran.

"There you are, Tony," said Rob. "There must be an underground opening; anyhow it's nothing like the other—there's no way through."

"Perhaps it's only a spring," said Tony. "It don't follow that the river comes through the rocks," and Tony stooped down and stared into the pool.

"Yes, it does, Tony. The stream comes through from the other side!"

Never in all his life did Tony Trumper move quicker than when he leaped to his feet then.

"Who spoke?" he cried. "What was that?"

"Don't ask me!" said Rob, staring about. "I didn't open my mouth."

"I know very well you didn't—it wasn't your voice, but who could it have been?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Don't you see me?"

A laugh rang out, but this only made it more perplexing than ever, for look in which direction they would, the boys could discover no one.

"Speak again! Who are you? Where are you?" called Rob. There was no answer.

Again and again Rob called, but it was just the same.

"By gracious, I don't like this!" exclaimed Tony. "It's enough to make a fellow's hair stand on end."

"Let's take a look into the woods. We must know what it means," said Rob. "There is somebody here, sure."

"Perhaps it was a poll parrot," suggested Tony. "Look, there's one on that tree now."

They had seen the parrots before, but Bob laughed at the suggestion.

"Don't be silly, Tony," he began, when his words were taken out of his mouth by the mysterious voice.

"Yes, Tony, don't be a fool!" it called. "I'm no poll parrot—oh, no!"

"Gee! This beats the band!" gasped Tony. "Say, Rob, let's fight out. I don't like this for a cent."

"And I'm no ghost, either, Tony!" cried the voice. "You needn't be afraid. Look up here, Rob Rollstone—here I am!"

Rob raised his eyes to the rocks, for the voice now seemed to him to come from far over his head.

Far up on the side of the cliff, some forty feet above him, he saw a face projecting.

"Isabella!" he cried.

There was no answer.

The face vanished.

When Rob called to Tony to look it had disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE BLACK DWARF WENT UP THE WALL.

There was mystery in Rob Rollstone's gold camp—a deep mystery—the mystery of the appearance of Isabella Esquivado's face up on the side of the cliff.

For the next two days Rob and Tony talked of little else, and a good part of their time was spent under the cliff watching the opening where the face had appeared when Isabella called down to them, but it did not appear again.

"We don't leave this place until we know what it all means," declared Rob, "but in the meanwhile there's no use in our fooling away all our time watching that hole. We must go to work and dig more gold."

"Gold is a mighty good thing," said Tony, "but s'pose we get a ton of it, Rob, what are we ever going to do with the blame stuff? How are we going to get it away?"

"Don't you fret about that," replied Rob. "The main thing is to get the dust. We'll talk about handling it later on."

So the boys put in three days' hard work with the same astonishing results.

The creek was fabulously rich. Every pan brought its great yield of gold.

Here was Rob Rollstone, the boy who had been driven away from home, in a fair way to become fabulously rich.

It was enough to turn anybody's head to see so much gold lying around, but it did not turn Rob's. He kept perfectly cool and worked away systematically during all that week.

It got to be the rule to work six hours a day at the creek, and the boys preferred to put the time in during the morning, which gave them the rest of the day free to themselves.

But there was other work to do besides gold washing.

"If we stay here any length of time we shall soon eat up all the provisions, Tony," remarked Rob on Monday night. "We must clear up the garden and plant more potatoes and other vegetables. I found a lot of seeds up in the loft; there's corn and onions and beans and parsley and a lot of other things. We'd better get them in the ground. There's no telling how long we are booked for here and we may as well prepare for a long stay."

So it was garden work after mining, and then egg-hunting in the high grass at the edge of the forest and Tony who acted as cook, had the meals to prepare.

Every evening that week the boys went up the creek to the "talking rock," as they got to calling it, and tried their best to solve the mystery. They would call and call, and when tired of that, sit and watch the hole, but all in vain. Nothing more was seen of Isabella. The strange experience of that Sunday afternoon began to seem like a dream.

Next Sunday morning Rob was up early.

Leaving Tony asleep, he took a plunge into a certain deep hole in the creek where the water was up to his neck.

Then, after a hurried breakfast, he started for the talking rock alone.

Tony did not seem inclined to get up, so Rob concluded to leave him undisturbed.

It was a beautiful morning, and the walk through the woods was full of interest to anyone accustomed to observe what is going on around him, as our Rob always was.

Parrots were peeping out of the thick foliage, awakening the echoes by their shrill cries; monkeys were leaping from branch to branch, or peering out from among the leaves taking Rob in as he passed.

Every now and again there would be a shrill crow, and a flock of fowl go scurrying away among the bushes.

Rob hurried on, bent upon reaching the talking rock as soon as possible, for he had an idea that by going there at an earlier hour than usual he might see something.

"I'll just lay in the bushes and quietly watch," he determined. "I won't show myself at all."

This plan he carried out. Reaching the stream, he concealed himself behind a thick clump of bushes, which bore a beautiful red flower of delicious fragrance, and watched the hole far up on the cliff for more than an hour.

It was slow work. Bees were humming, birds were twittering, and the monkeys kept up their everlasting chatter. Rob grew sleepy. He tried to fight it off, and for awhile succeeded, but before he knew it he was fast asleep.

The next thing Rob Rollstone knew he was suddenly awakened by feeling someone near him in an indistinct sort of way.

He opened his eyes and saw an ugly black face bending down close to his.

Instantly it flashed over him that it was another orang-outang and he threw out his hand to push the creature away, starting up with a sharp cry.

It was no orang-outang. An ugly little dwarf, black as midnight and nearly naked sprang away with a cry which double discounted Rob's in its shrillness, and went scampering off through the bushes as fast as his little legs could carry him.

Nowadays they seldom show themselves, but are sometimes seen among the mountains of Luzon.

"By gracious, I'll have you or bust, thought Rob, and he ran after the dwarf as fast as the tangle would allow.

He was not quick enough to catch the dwarf, but he was in time to see where he went.

Out of the forest, and right under the cliff, the dwarf ran, and Rob saw that there was a stout tendril of some climbing plant hanging down from the hole.

The dwarf seized the tendril and went up the face of the cliff hand over hand like a monkey.

Reaching the hole just as Rob got his hand on the improvised rope, he popped through it and vanished like a shot, and his wild, shrill laugh was heard growing fainter and fainter, and seeming to die away in the distance.

"After you, my friend," muttered Rob; "I can go up that vine, and that's just exactly what I'm going to do."

He seized the vine and began his perilous climb, hand over hand.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER BIG NUGGET FOUND.

Now there is scarcely one boy in a thousand who would have the courage to undertake such perilous business as this, but Rob was the one, and he meant to put it through.

He came precious near doing it, too. He was almost up to

the hole when suddenly Isabella's face appeared at the opening in the rock.

"Go down, Rob! Go down!" she cried. "The rope will be cut in one instant! Go down!"

Bob heard her and looked up.

"Isabella!" he called, but the girl vanished on the instant.

For a few seconds Rob hung there in a state of uncertainty, then he slid down to the ground.

It was well that he did so, for his feet had scarcely touched the earth when the rope came tumbling down about his head.

It had been cut clean across with a sharp knife, and Rob shuddered at the thought of what would have happened if he had still been clinging to it.

"Isabella!" he shouted. "Isabella!"

Then the girl's face re-appeared at the opening.

"Don't try it again, Rob!" she called. "Be patient! You shall see me soon."

She drew back out of sight then, and although Rob called and called he could get no answer.

At last he gave it up and started back for the hut to meet Tony on the way, and surprise him with the account of what had occurred.

"It's mighty strange," said Tony. "I wish I'd been on that rope; I'd have gone on."

"Nonsense," replied Rob. "You wouldn't have done anything of the sort. Do you suppose I wanted to break my neck—that's just what would have happened if I'd kept on. We've just got to wait and see what comes of all this. One satisfaction, we know that Isabella is alive."

And this is all they did know about the matter after three weeks had passed.

During those three weeks gold digging went steadily on, and with the same wonderful results.

The next morning after Rob's adventure at the cliff Tony made a bright suggestion which was at once acted upon.

"Let's dam up the creek and turn it out of its channel," he said; "it would be a good sight easier for us to work."

There was not much trouble in doing this, for after all they only needed a small stretch of bottom to work on.

So selecting a place where they had been most successful in working out rich pans, the boys dug a semi-circular trench about twelve feet long, and cutting down a few trees fixed them in place across the stream.

This accomplished, they worked one whole day rolling stones down to this improvised crib, and banked them up against it on a great quantity of earth, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the water flow off into the trench, and leave a good strip of the creek bottom dry.

"Now, then, for some old-fashioned digging," said Rob next morning. "We'll sink a shaft and see what we find."

"I suppose the deeper down we go the richer it ought to get," said Tony.

"Well, I don't know about that," replied Rob. "I remember hearing an old fellow in our town who used to be a miner in the early days of California say that those gold beds ran in sheets and you were liable to work through them any time."

"But the gold cannot be all on the surface—that's sure."

"Certainly not. It stands to reason that we ought to continue to strike it for a few feet or so and we might take out a lot of gold in that space with twelve feet of length which we've got."

But this was a matter which remained to be proved, and the boys went bravely to work to solve the problem.

Success was with them from the start.

The very first day they struck a bed of coarse flake gold about a foot down below the creek bottom, which seemed practically inexhaustible.

Panful after panful was taken out, and as the days followed

each other Rob saw riches heaping up in a fashion which seemed almost fabulous.

Three weeks saw no change. Rob estimated the value of the gold at over a hundred thousand dollars, besides which there was the nugget which as yet had not been brought up from the other sink.

Nothing from Isabella as yet. Rob had been to the cliff many times, and once he watched all night, but nothing came of it. The girl made no sign.

One Saturday afternoon just before quitting time, while Rob was carrying up the result of the day's washing to the hut, he heard Tony give a shout.

"Come here, Rob! Come here!" he cried. "Don't waste a minute! I believe I've struck it rich now!"

Rob dropped his gold upon the grass and hurried back to the creek.

"There! What do you call that?" cried Tony, pointing to a dirty brown mass which protruded from the sand in which he had just been digging.

"A nugget, by gracious!" exclaimed Rob.

"That's what I think it is, yet I can't see any gold."

Rob jumped in and dusted off the earth.

"There you are!" he cried. "See that gold till you can't rest! Why, Tony, it's almost solid! Hold on till I pull it up."

"You can't do it," said Tony. "I tried; it's as firm as a rock."

Bob tugged and tugged, but it was no use. There was no budging the big nugget, so he got the pick and Tony worked on the other side with his long-handled spade.

At last they succeeded in loosening it, and together they lifted the nugget out of the creek.

It must have weighed fully one hundred and fifty pounds, and the biggest part of it seemed to be gold.

"There's no use in lugging that thing up to the hut," declared Rob. "We'd better break it up where it is."

The words were no more than uttered when an arrow dropped between the boys, and lodged back downward in the earth.

"Ginger!" cried Tony; "more Igorrotes. Where in thunder did that come from, Rob?"

"Look! Look! There they are!" exclaimed Rob, pointing to the cliffs on the other side of the stream.

Just then another arrow came whizzing toward them, and another and still another.

Half way up the cliff Tony saw a band of some twenty naked dwarfs standing.

They were armed with long bows, and as the boys stood staring up at them a perfect shower of arrows came flying down toward the stream.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT LAY BEYOND THE CLIFF.

"Skedaddle, Rob! This is a good time for skipping!" cried Tony, stooping down and making a rush for the hut.

Rob followed, and the arrows followed them; it was the greatest wonder in the world that they were not hit.

Tony seized the rifle and started for the door.

"By gracious, I'll blow some of those fellows to blazes!" he cried, but Bob laid a firm hand on him and pulled back.

"No," he said, emphatically. "Don't you do it."

"Why not?" growled Tony. "They are willing to do us all right enough."

"Because it won't be any use, in the first place, and because it may do Isabella harm in the second."

"Isabella be blowed. Why don't she show herself and explain things? Are we to stand still and be shot with poisoned

arrows by these infernal little black dwarfs all on her account?"

"We ain't shot yet, Tony, but anyhow, what good would it do for us to kill one or two of them? It would only make the rest more determined than ever to do us up. See, they are going now. No, it won't pay to shoot them, and that's right."

Tony yielded to persuasion and they watched the dwarfs until they had disappeared around a bend in the cliff.

Nothing more was seen of them that evening, but Rob felt that there was trouble in the air.

"We'll keep a watch, Tony," he declared. "It won't do to take any chances. Something may strike us before morning; at least I feel that way."

It was hard work for Tony, for there was never a greater sleepy-head than he.

He stuck it out until a little after midnight, and then when Rob came in from a turn around the hut to make sure that everything was all right, he found Tony fast asleep in the chair.

Rob shook him up and tumbled him into the bunk, telling him to go to sleep until he was called. Then he started out with the intention of walking down to the stream, where he could get a better look up and down the sink. Before he had time to get half way, he suddenly saw a dark object creeping on all fours over the ground.

It was one of the dwarfs; his long bow was swung over his little back; he got over the ground like a dog, and as near as Rob could judge, was making straight for the nugget.

Rob slipped behind a big tree and watched. In a moment the Aeta reached the nugget, and to Rob's intense astonishment, he picked it up as easily as possible, raised it in the air, and landed it on his shoulders and trotted off up the creek as lightly as though he had carried no load at all.

Now a fool would have been sure to have fired then.

To see the dwarf going off with the prize find of those weeks of hard work would have been quite enough to have fixed that.

But Rob Rollstone was no fool.

"He knows a way out of this place and I want to know it, too," was the thought which instantly came to him.

He ran swiftly to the next tree and then to the next, and so gained the forest. The dwarf, meanwhile, went trotting on ahead with the big nugget. He seemed to have no suspicion that he was being followed, for he never looked back, but kept right along up the creek while Rob followed, keeping carefully in the shadow of the woods.

So on until they reached the cliff where the dwarf threw down the nugget, and stood for a moment to rest.

"Is he going up through the hole?" thought Rob. "I can't let him take the nugget with him; Tony will never forgive me if I do that, but I hate to fire all the same."

For a moment he stood rifle in hand, irresolute, and then it was too late.

Suddenly the dwarf stooped down, picked up the nugget and threw it into the pool at the foot of the cliff, and with a quick spring dove in after it and disappeared.

Rob was beside the pool in an instant. The water was full of rings, spreading wider and wider. It had been no freak of the imagination. Down into the pool the dwarf had surely gone.

"That's the way out of here," thought Rob. "By gracious, I'm going to try it. I must and will know more of this!"

He peered into the pool, but could see nothing, of course, and yet he knew that it could not be very deep, for he had often seen the bottom on his previous visits to the place.

"It can't be much risk to try it," muttered Rob. "I'm going to do it, anyhow! Here goes!"

He kicked off his shoes and threw aside his coat and hat,

retaining the rest of his clothing, feeling that he might come in contact with Isabella before the adventure ended.

Then he sprang into the pool, and worked his way down to the bottom, and as soon as he got his eyes open, saw that he had made no mistake.

A strange light seemed to shine through the water.

Rob could see an arched opening under the rocks, and could feel the current as the stream rushed through it.

The light seemed to shine through this natural archway. It was very bright, and flashed as he looked. Rob struck out boldly for the archway, determined to force his way through.

There was but little trouble in accomplishing this. A few bold strokes put the boy on the other side of the cliffs.

The light was now brighter than ever. Rob let himself come to the surface, and gained the bank gasping like a fish.

It was a startling sight which met his gaze. A long stretch of open country lay before him, bounded on both sides by lofty mountains.

Not a hundred yards away was a fair-sized plantation house wrapped in flames, with a band of naked dwarfs howling and shrieking as they danced madly about the burning building.

As Rob looked, the roof fell in and a shower of sparks flew up. Out through the door sprang a tall Igorrote. He carried a young girl in his arms.

It was Isabella, and as the black ran down the steps of the burning building she gave one wild cry for help.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROB DOES BRAVE WORK.

The sight of the burning house and Isabella in the arms of the Igorrote recalled vividly to Rob Rollstone's mind the first time he beheld the beautiful Spanish girl on the memorable day of his landing in Luzon.

Need we say that ninety-nine boys out of a hundred would have jumped back into the stream and made their escape through the hole under the rocks?

This was just what Rob did not do.

The light from the burning building was too uncertain to enable Rob to make out whether Isabella was unconscious or not, but this made no difference; he determined upon his course instantly.

"Perhaps I can bluff those fellows," he thought. "If I am smart I'm sure I can."

Rob had his rifle with him, and he had been careful to protect it as much as possible from the water when he passed through the hole.

Instantly he set up a wild shout—a most unearthly noise, which he kept agoing as he ran forward.

Of course, being in the shadow, the dwarf Aetas could not see him. They stopped their own racket and began staring around to see where the cry came from, and the Igorrote stopped, too, turned and looked down the stream.

"My chance!" thought Rob. "Can I do it without killing her? I'm going to try."

Considering the comparatively short practice he had had, Rob had now become quite a shot, and what was better still, he had absolute confidence in his own ability to handle the rifle.

As the Igorrote looked around, the lower part of his body was exposed, as was also his head. Between the two was Isabella's fair form. Could Rob be sure enough of his aim to make it safe to shoot?

One second of hesitation, and the brave boy blazed away at the Igorrote's head.

There was a howl, and Isabella dropped to the ground, while the Igorrote, with his hands up to his head, ran like mad toward the dwarfs.

Again and again Rob fired, keeping up the same unearthly cry all the while.

It worked finely! The dwarfs could not see him, could not imagine where the shots came from, although several found out where they went to.

All in a moment they stampeded, and ran off up the valley shouting like mad.

Rob ran like a deer, and in an instant was at Isabella's side; she was in the act of rising when Rob threw his arm around her—it was the first she knew that he was there.

"Oh, Rob! Is it you?"

"Nobody else! I can save you! Anybody else in the house to be saved?"

"No, no! There's none there!"

"Are you hurt? Can you walk?"

"Certainly I can; but where shall we go? How came you here? Look—look! The Aetas are coming again!"

"Run down to the stream, Isabella! I'll guard the rear!"

While talking Rob had not been idle, but had loaded up again and was ready to give the Aetas another round as he retreated after his fair charge.

In a few moments they were at the wall, plainly to be seen now, for the plantation house was burning most brilliantly, making their figures stand out against the rocks in bold relief.

As the Aetas caught sight of them and realized that they had only one man to deal with, they turned and made a rush in a body, waking the echoes with their wild cries.

Rob's rifle was now empty. There was no need to reload unless he meant to stand his ground and fight the Aetas, and this was exactly what he did not mean to do.

"Isabella, can you swim?" he asked, hastily.

"Why, certainly, but what——"

"Can you dive? Can you swim under water?"

"Of course I can; but tell me——"

"We won't talk," broke in Rob; "you follow me, and in one minute you will be safe."

Thus saying, Rob plunged into the stream, Isabella following his example.

"There's a passage through under the wall! Swim straight down the stream as near the bottom as you can!" he called, as he went.

Then came the anxious moment.

While passing under the rocks Rob could not be sure that Isabella was following him, but she was, and in a moment they were both out on the other side of the rocky barrier which divided this strange valley, and for the time being were safe.

"Oh, Rob! you have saved me!" gasped Isabella, as she crawled out upon the bank. "The Aetas cannot know of this."

"Oh, but they do," said Rob, "and you are not safe yet, but you shall be in a minute—just you wait."

There were a number of big stones lying around, and Rob hastily tumbled several of them into the water; then diving down again he piled them up against the mouth of the passage and with the help of a few more, which Isabella rolled in, managed to close it entirely, and none too soon, either, for just as he finished he heard the dwarfs on the other side.

They fumbled about and punched away at the stones, but without any effect.

Twice again Rob dove down, remaining under water as long as he could, watching the improvised dam. The second time he found all quiet. The dwarfs had evidently retreated.

"Now we can call ourselves safe for the moment," panted Rob, all breathless from his exertions, "but how is it about the opening in the wall overhead there? Is there any way by which they can reach that?"

"No," replied Isabella, promptly. "No, there is none. The

only way is by the ladder, and that is in my uncle's house. By this time I have no doubt it is burned."

"You are sure there is no other way of getting up?"

"Perfectly sure."

"You speak of your uncle, was he in the house? Has he been killed?"

"He went off into the mountains this afternoon on a hunting trip along with his two servants. He did not return at sundown as he promised. What may have happened to him I do not know, but he was not in the house when the attack came. I was there alone. I shudder to think what would have happened to me if you had not come as you did."

"Isabella, you have a lot to tell me. How is it that I find you here when the last I saw you the Igorrotes had you in their power, and——"

"Oh, it is easily explained. We had not gone far before we met my uncle and four of his men; when the attack was made they retreated into the woods; they were waiting for their chance to revenge themselves on the Igorrotes and they got it, and at the same time rescued me."

"And your uncle brought you up here into the mountains?"

"Yes. That house you saw was his; he had a gold mine near here that he worked this long time. I suppose you wonder why I did not tell you all this before; there was no other reason than that it was my uncle's wish, Rob. He is a peculiar man. He does not like strangers and above all he detests Americans. When I reported to him that I had seen you on the other side of the wall he made me promise not to let our acquaintance go any further. I had to obey him. I did not know what else to do."

"He must be a peculiar man to leave you alone there, exposed to the attacks of the Aetas," said Rob. "I am sure I don't want to intrude on him, but tell me, does this valley where we are now belong to him?"

"No; it belongs to no one, he says. Some years ago an Englishman worked here. He built the hut where I suppose you and Tony are now living, and after a while he went away. How he got into the valley or out again, my uncle does not know, but it was certainly not from our side of the wall."

"I think I could explain," replied Rob. "Shall we go to the hut and wake up Tony? He'll be surprised enough to see you here."

"I am willing to do anything you say, Rob. We must return at night, though, and watch for my uncle. The Aetas hate him, and if he falls into their hands he is lost. Do you know, I think that my old enemy, Captain Gwando, of the insurgents, is at the bottom of this attack. I believe it was the intention of that Igorrote to take me to him and—oh, Rob! Look here!"

Thus suddenly exclaiming, Isabella pointed up to the opening in the wall.

"Captain Gwando!" gasped the girl. "It is as I feared! No, no! Don't shoot, Rob!"

Instinctively Rob had raised his rifle, but before the words were fairly spoken there was nothing to shoot at.

A fearful cry rang out upon the stillness of the night, and the face disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

"AGUA! AGUA! AGUA!"

For a few moments Rob and Isabella remained in breathless silence, watching the opening in the cliff.

"You are sure it was Captain Gwando?" asked Rob.

"Sure! How can I make any mistake? Can I forget the man who killed my poor father, my bitterest enemy? Oh, no!"

"But what happened to him. It seems there was a way or getting up there after all."

"My idea is that he was nearby all the time. The half-burned ladder was taken out of the house and used. It broke under his weight."

"By gracious, I believe you are right," said Rob, "and that would account for the cry, but let us be on the safe side and watch for a few moments to see if he comes back again."

They watched for nearly an hour before Isabella was willing to make a move. The night was so warm that their clothes speedily dried, and neither felt any ill effects from their bath.

While they sat there Rob told Isabella all that had happened to them, and of their wonderful luck at gold digging.

"My uncle knows there is gold here in this valley," said Isabella, "but he cares nothing for it. He is a strange man, Rob—almost a hermit. All he cares for is to be left alone with his books and his rifle. His constant study is birds. He had an enormous collection, part in this house and part in the other—both are destroyed now. The loss of those in the other house nearly drove him mad; this loss will finish him, I am sure."

Nothing more being seen of Captain Gwando, Rob led the way down to the hut, and they sat outside on the bench and talked until sunrise, for Rob felt that it was necessary to keep watch.

Tony's amazement when he got up and found Isabella with Rob can be better imagined than described, and the explanations had to be all gone over again.

"We must do something about my uncle," declared Isabella. "Rob, I don't want to ask too much, but you will venture back into the other valley and see how matters stand, will you not?"

"Why, of course, I will," replied Rob, promptly, "that is just what I was going to propose."

And this was just what he did before the sun was an hour high.

Rob's report upon his return through the passage, under the cliffs, was not encouraging.

He found the house a mass of blackened ruins, with not a sign of anyone near. Under the cliff where the opening was lay the broken remains of a half-burned ladder, showing that precisely what they supposed had happened to Captain Gwando, but there was no trace of the Filipino, nor did anything occur to throw the least light upon the mystery after the lapse of two full weeks.

It was strange to have Isabella with them in the hut, but the boys soon began to find the change a very agreeable one.

Instead of bemoaning her misfortunes, as most girls would have done, Isabella at once set about making herself useful, and after the first day assumed entire charge of the house-keeping, proving herself to be not only an excellent cook, but a first-class housekeeper in every respect.

Rob left a letter, stating where Isabella was, nailed to a tree in front of Senor Esquivado's house, but at the end of two weeks it was still there, and they began to think it certain that the old planter had fallen a victim to the Aetas.

Meanwhile gold digging progressed finely.

As fast as one point on the creek bed was exhausted another was found equally rich in the yellow dust.

By the end of those two weeks nearly twenty-five thousand dollars additional had been taken out. The big nugget first discovered was brought up to the hut, but the nugget stolen by the dwarf they could not find, and there seemed to be no reason to doubt that the Aetas had carried it away.

"We had better be beginning to think about getting out of here," said Tony one evening. "We've got gold enough now to make us rich, and I say let's strike for Manila and see if there is not some chance of getting home."

"Not until we've worked out a million," replied Rob, emphatically. "I'm content here. I don't want to move."

"Nor I, until I know something of my poor uncle's fate," said Isabella. "Rob, do you know I think sometimes that we ought to go and look for him. We ought to have done it at the start. It was not right for us to remain idly here."

"I've had an idea from the first that sooner or later we should hear something from him," said Rob, "but I am willing to go on the search. When shall we start?"

"I say to-morrow."

"Then to-morrow it shall be. You have a general notion which way he went?"

"Yes, I have been a short distance up the mountains myself. I think I can guide you."

"We'll go, then. The gold has been all securely buried, as you know, and we can leave everything just as it is. Considering the way we first found it, I have no doubt we shall find it all right on our return."

This was the plan when they went to bed that night, but before morning something happened which changed the whole situation.

Rob had been asleep perhaps two hours when he was suddenly awakened by a terrific crash. He leaped out of the bunk and ran to the door of the hut.

The moon was shining brightly and all was as still as death. Rob could not imagine what had occurred, and was just about to give it up and go back to bed again, when all at once a shrill cry was heard on the cliff on the other side of the stream.

Looking up, Rob saw three Aetas jumping about on the cliffs in the wildest kind of way, brandishing their spears.

"Agua! Agua! Agua!" they shouted again and again; then, running off among the rocks, they disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE FLOOD CAME DOWN OVER THE CLIFFS.

Something was in the wind. It almost looked as if the Aetas had meant to give our boy gold diggers a friendly warning.

Agua means water in Spanish. Why the dwarfs should scream out "water" in that excited way unless there was some special reason for it Rob could not guess.

Just then Tony came tumbling out of the hut, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"What was that thundering noise, Rob?" he asked.

"Just what I'm trying to make out," replied Rob. "Did you hear the dwarfs?"

"Heard somebody holler. Thought it was you."

"No, no! There were three Aetas up there on the cliffs just a second ago. They were yelling 'agua,' that's the Spanish for water, you know."

"I don't know, but I'm willing to take your word for it, Rob. What woke me was that thundering loud crash. At first I thought I had dreamed it and I didn't get up, but when — Great guns, Rob! Look there!"

Tony pointed excitedly toward the cliffs, and now for the time Rob perceived that a great mass of rock had fallen down from the heights above, and lay piled up at the base of the cliffs.

"There's the cause of your noise!" cried Tony. "The rocks must have been loosened by the earthquake; they lost their hold and tumbled down. Let's go over there and see."

Leaping across the creek, the boys ran to the spot.

The amount of rock which had fallen was tremendous. Great broken masses lay piled up in every direction. Some of it was a dirty white in color and when Rob picked up a piece of this kind he found that it was tremendously heavy. Holding it up in the moonlight he saw that it fairly bristled with tiny yellow specks.

"Good heavens, Tony!" he cried, "this rock is full of gold!"

Tony had scarcely time to express his astonishment, when both the boys became aware that something was going on overhead.

A dull roaring was heard above them on the cliffs coming apparently from a considerable distance.

Rob called Tony's attention to it, and they stood listening, wondering what it could mean.

"That's strange," remarked Tony, after a little while. "It sounds just like the roar of Niagara Falls. I was out there once when I was a boy."

"I declare, I believe it is water," said Rob. "Can it be that the dwarfs—listen, Tony! It's getting louder every moment. There's going to be trouble here."

"That's what it is, Rob. I bet you what you like, some mountain lake or other has broken loose. That's what the dwarfs meant. Perhaps there was an earthquake, and all we heard of it was the crash."

"We must get back to the house and wake up Isabella!" cried Rob. "There's no telling what may come out of this."

Before they had time to cross the creek, the roaring had so increased, that it sounded like distant thunder. As they drew near the hut, the boys looked back and were treated to a sight which they were likely to remember for a lifetime.

There on top of the cliffs was an immense wall of water fully forty feet high and a good hundred feet in width, rolling toward the edge of the broken rocks.

"Great heavens! We are lost!" gasped Rob.

It was all he had time to say, for in an instant the water broke and came thundering down over the cliffs.

The place where the dwarfs had stood was now a roaring cataract, twice as high as Niagara although not as wide.

The volume of water which came rushing over it was enormous. In an instant it began spreading itself over the valley.

Rob saw that in a very short time the inclosure must fill up, for the narrow opening through which the creek passed was entirely unable to carry the water off.

A shout for Isabella brought the girl to the door. The roaring had awakened her and she had already come down out of the loft where she slept.

"Merciful Heaven, Rob! What is this?" she cried. "Where does all that water come from? We shall be surrounded with it in just no time at all!"

"It will swamp us," replied Rob, grimly. "We must make for the other valley if it isn't already too late to get through the hole under the wall."

But it was too late. With all speed they plunged into the woods and ran up the creek, but they soon found themselves running in water.

The flood continued; the water was spreading everywhere. Deeper and deeper it grew as they advanced; Rob realized that even if he and Tony were able to do it Isabella could never get through the hole.

"We must get back to the hut," he said. "That will float, at all events. We can camp out on the roof. This thing can't last forever, and in the end the creek will carry the water off."

But they had gone too far for safety.

Before they had covered two hundred yards on their return, the water was up to their waists.

A moment more, and they were swimming through the woods, and when they reached the open Rob saw, to his horror, that the hut was already partly under water. The whole open space to the opposite cliffs was now a lake, and still the water poured down over the rocks with thunderous roar.

"We are lost!" groaned Tony.

And, indeed, it did look very much that way.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ESCAPE TO THE CLIFFS.

Surely there could have been no braver girl in all the Philippine Islands than Isabella Esquivado proved herself to be in that trying moment when death seemed to stare her in the face.

For the hut was still a long way off, and the water was running so rapidly in the valley that it seemed likely it would be entirely submerged.

"It would have been better if we had stayed in the woods and taken to the tree tops," remarked Isabella, calmly. "You needn't support me, Rob. I can swim as well as you can, and I can swim better alone."

"We can go back to the woods now if you say so," answered Rob, "but if we get stuck in the tree tops we'll starve to death sure. If we can stick to the hut, at least we will have something to eat."

"We'll make a try for the hut, then," said Isabella. "Tony, if you'd be good enough to swim a little bit to one side instead of right in front of me, I could get along better; remember it is not as easy for a woman to swim with all her clothes on as it is for a man. There, that's better! Now for a race to the hut! I'll beat you both!"

There was something encouraging in the very tones in which she spoke, and it certainly did help the boys to keep their spirits up to have her with them, and that helped them to reach the hut, which all three presently did in safety.

The water was up to the level of the loft window; the garden, the creek, every familiar landmark had vanished.

Wild cries of distress came from the woods; parrots were squawking, monkeys chattering, and every now and then a strange cry was heard, half animal, half human. Rob thought, as he pushed up the window sash and climbed into the loft, that it might be the cry of an orang-outang, for he never doubted that other specimens of the big man-ape existed in the woods besides the one they had killed.

Helping Isabella in through the window and leaving Tony to follow, Rob threw open the scuttle and climbed out upon the roof of the hut, which luckily was not very steep.

Here he had a full view of his surroundings, and one glance over the cliffs showed him that there was little or no hope. Either the hut would have to float off its foundations or be entirely submerged, for the water was still pouring over the edge of the precipice at a fearful rate.

"We can't stay here," said Tony, when he came out on the roof. "This is going to be under water in no time."

"I look for it to float," said Isabella, "and I think it will."

"If it don't, all we can do is to swim back to the woods and take to the tree tops," said Rob. "Perhaps we can manage to work our way over to the wall where the opening is into the other valley; if the water reaches the level of that hole we might go through."

"A slim chance," replied Isabella. "I hardly think it can go that far; it must stop running soon."

"Where do you suppose it all comes from? Have you any idea?" asked Rob, looking off at the rushing torrent which glittered and shimmered in the moonlight, making a picture as charming as it was alarming, a perfect study for an artist, in fact.

"I've often heard my uncle speak of a lake away up in the mountains," replied Isabella; "my idea is that the water comes from there finding its way into some underground reservoir, the barrier of which has broken away."

"That sounds reasonable enough," said Rob. "Heavens! how rapidly it is rising! It must be fully eight feet deep all over the valley now. It will be in the loft inside of a few moments if it keeps on."

"Oh, the gold! The gold! We are ruined!" groaned Tony. "Just my blamed luck! I might have known that something would happen to keep me from getting away with the dust."

Still the water kept on coming; it rose until it ran into the loft, and then came up almost to a level with the roof.

It was not a time to talk, and even Isabella could not keep up her cheerful remarks. All were watching and waiting for the moment to come when the fate of the hut would be decided.

"I wonder if it floats whether it will tip over or not?" asked Isabella, at last; "if it does, why, of course we have got to take to the water again."

"I don't think it will," said Rob; "it is only a light structure anyhow, and the weight is all on the lower floor."

"I suppose you won't have any trouble in getting down to the closet where we keep the provisions. There is only a small supply of cooked stuff, but it is enough to last us a day or two, and by that time the water must go down."

"Oh, I can manage that easy enough," said Rob; "what I am hoping for is that we can contrive to get to the hole in the wall. We might paddle the hut there if it wasn't for the woods."

"Time enough to think about that when the hut floats," replied Isabella. "I don't feel by any means sure that is going to, and——"

"Hooray! She's floating now!" cried Tony, suddenly. "Look at the trees!"

It was a fact. The hut had left its foundations without any one being aware of it. The trees appeared to be moving past them; they were moving over toward the cliffs on the opposite side of the valley slowly but surely.

For a few moments they continued to watch, hardly daring to feel certain of their good fortune.

"We are all right," cried Rob at last. "We are going to run against the cliffs over there and I believe we can climb them. I've often examined that side; there's a wall about twenty feet high running from one end of the valley to the other, but above that it is all broken, and if we could once get on top of the wall it would be an easy matter to climb to the top."

Little by little the hut drifted across the valley and at last struck the cliffs. All this time the water had been steadily rising, for its volume as it came rushing over the rocks seemed rather to increase than diminish.

By the time they ran against the cliffs it was almost daylight, and with the first gleam of dawn Rob saw that by standing on Tony's shoulders he could grasp the ledge above.

There was a coil of rope in the loft and Rob dove down through the scuttle and after one or two attempts managed to secure it.

"Now is our time," he said. "We are not moving much and if I can only get up on that ledge I can easily pull you both up after me."

"Only thing is," said Isabella, "can we get to the top? If we should happen to be stuck on the side of the cliff there it would be a bad business; I'd rather remain where we are."

"What lies on top?" asked Rob. "Do you know anything about the country up there?"

"Nothing; the mountains rise behind it. You can see that for yourself."

"Is that the side your uncle went up on?"

"Yes, it is; and it is easy enough to get up there from the other valley."

"In which case if we could once make the top, we could easily descend into the other valley?"

"Certainly we could."

"Which makes it doubly worth trying for; the hut may sink at any time, or it may shift and turn over. I think we had better take our chances on the rocks, so here goes for a try."

Tony now took his place against the wall, along which the hut was slowly drifting, and Rob managed to get upon his shoulders. He could just reach the ledge. Grasping it firmly, he gave one spring and was upon it in an instant.

"Throw up the rope, Tony!" he called. "It is Isabella's turn next."

Tony tossed up the rope and Rob caught it. Then the other end was made fast under Isabella's arms, and although it was a dead weight and a hard pull, Rob managed to get her up.

Tony came more easily.

"Safe for the moment!" cried Rob, as they stood there on the ledge and watched the hut drift slowly away.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTURED BY THE DWARFS.

"There comes the sun! Now we can see what we are doing. Look! It's easy climbing above us here. This is not bad at all."

It was Isabella who spoke these cheerful words, and they served to dispel any lingering regrets that the boys may have felt as they watched the hut move away.

But after all it was only an escape from dangers known to dangers unknown, and Rob felt that he could not rest until he had gained the top of the cliffs.

Now followed the attempt to accomplish this.

A hundred feet of ragged rocks towered above them. It was a climb full of danger, for one misstep would send them whirling down to their death, but with Rob leading the way, and Tony bringing up the rear, both helping Isabella all they could, they at last managed to reach the top.

Exclamations of wonder burst from all. A vast stretch of country lay before them; it was mountain above mountain, peak upon peak, with a fertile table-land partly covered with forest, stretching away to the foot of the next rise.

In short it was such a sight as one might dream about, beautiful to the last degree, but its beauty was forgotten before they had gone a hundred yards, for in turning a point of rocks where the cliffs rose higher they suddenly came upon an Aeta camp.

It was terribly startling. Around a fire fully fifty of the ugly little dwarfs lay sprawling, never dreaming of this interruption, although they were quick to act, nevertheless.

In an instant all were on their feet, and they came swarming around Rob and his friends, calling to each other, chattering, laughing, brandishing their little spears, shaking rough knotted clubs and making altogether a fearful to do.

"Speak to them, Isabella. Say something to them in Spanish!" cried Rob. "We shall all be killed if you don't."

Isabella tried it. What she said the boys, of course, could not tell, but the dwarfs ceased their clatter, and one stepping out from the rest began to talk.

Rob watched anxiously; the rifles had been left behind, of course. They had no means of defense in case of an attack.

After a few moments' talk, Isabella began to explain.

"We are prisoners," she said. "He says we have got to go with them to their town."

"And you can't persuade them to let us go free?"

"No; they know us. They seem to have some special reason for wanting us. They will listen to nothing; as for myself I fear the worst."

"What do you mean? Are these the dwarfs who burned down your uncle's house?"

"They are. I am sure of it."

"I see; you are thinking of Captain Gwando."

"How can I help it? I know that he is a power among the Aetas as well as the Igorrotes. In old times before the uprising he used to boast that he was almost a king among them. For years he has worked a gold mine somewhere in these mountains. He used to come to my father's house and bring great bags of gold dust, which father always bought. We kept on friendly terms with him because we feared the man; you know with what reason, Rob, but when he wanted to marry me and I refused the trouble began."

While Isabella was talking the Aetas began to grow restless, and all at once they came swarming around the prisoners, and without giving them the least chance for resistance, separated them and hurried them away over the plain.

Fully a dozen clustered around Rob and dragged him forward.

Tony was pulled along behind in the same fashion, but Isabella was taken off another way, and the boys soon lost sight of her behind the rocks.

Twice Rob tried to break away and follow her, but it was no use.

The dwarfs prodded him with their sharp-pointed spears, and beat him with their little clubs.

Tony got his dose too, and howled with pain.

"For Heaven's sake go on, Rob, and do as they want you to!" he called out. "They are like a swarm of mosquitoes. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if their spears were poisoned. This is the worst yet! I wish we had stuck to the hut."

But wishing had nothing to do with it. Go the boys had to, and they never stopped going until passing into the forest they came upon a large cluster of conical huts, with high-pointed roofs thatched with straw.

A swarm of dogs and children came rushing out upon them. The dogs barked and the children screamed, and there was a general clatter which only came to an end when the boys were taken into one of the huts and tied up.

Here they lay for hours, the dwarfs crowding about the doorway, peering in at them. None ventured inside the hut, however, and there was no attempt made to harm the boys.

It was a dreadful situation, though. Rob grew so thirsty that he was almost choked. He tried every way in his power to make the dwarfs understand that he wanted water, but it was no use. As for Tony he was in just as bad a condition, and toward the last could only lie there and groan.

Night brought no relief, except from the visits of the dwarfs, for as soon as it grew dark the boys were left alone, and as time dragged wearily on, the noise outside the hut ceased. It began to look as if they were going to be left to starve to death, but to Rob the worst of all was the thought of Isabella's fate.

"Rob," whispered Tony, after a long silence. "Rob, are you asleep?"

"No," replied Rob. "How can I sleep, Tony? I'm almost dead. Oh, if I could only break these infernal cords! They

are nothing but bark, anyhow, but they are stronger than the strongest rope."

"Mine are almost broken, Rob."

"What? What?"

"Oh, it is just as I tell you. There's a sharp stone here. I got tired of lying on it, and I took to rubbing the bark rope against it. I think it will cut through in a moment. Say, isn't it strange it has been so quiet outside there?"

"Why, it is night. The dwarfs have all gone to bed."

"Don't you believe a word of it. Didn't it grow quiet all of a sudden? I tell you there's something in the wind."

"I wish I was in the wind, or in the sea, or somewhere—anything but this, Tony. How are you getting along with the cord?"

"I don't know. I can't see, of course, but I'm just grinding away, and I think something will come of it. Hello! By thunder, there goes the cord! Rob, my hands are free!"

"Bully for you! Have you got your knife?"

"You bet, and it won't take me long to use it, either. Here goes! That settles it!"

Tony sprang to his feet, and to set Rob free was only the work of a moment.

"We must go slow now," breathed Rob, as they stole out of the hut. "It will be bad for the first dwarf who tackles me, you bet."

But now a surprise awaited them, for as they stole on among the huts, they could see nobody.

Profound silence hung over the Aeta village. Growing bolder, the boys ventured to peer through the open doors of the huts as they passed.

All seemed to be empty; one after another was examined—it was all the same.

The dwarfs had vanished, and Rob and Tony had the Aeta village to themselves.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SNAKE MAN IN THE CAVE.

"Tony, this is a great start!"

"I'll be hanged if it isn't, Rob; there don't seem to be any-one here."

"Not a living soul as far as I can make out. What can have become of them? There's something very strange about all this."

"So strange that I don't like it," said Tony. "I can't help but think that they are watching us somewhere and if we try to leave the village we are going to get a shower of arrows about our heads."

"We'll try what will happen if we get a drink of water and something to eat," replied Rob. "I'll risk the arrows for a swallow of water, and only last night we had more than we knew what to do with—here goes!"

A stream flowed through the village, and the boys lost no time in getting one of the earthen jars of the dwarfs out of a hut by the aid of which they slacked their thirst. In the same hut they were fortunate to find a number of hard baked cakes made of some sort of meal, not pleasant eating by any means, but they served to quiet the pangs of hunger.

After they had eaten all they wanted they walked to the end of the village, and were pushing on into the forest with the idea of hiding themselves until morning, when the loud barking of a dog brought them to a sudden halt.

"Look out!" said Rob. "We don't want to run into any

dogs, Tony. Where is that fellow, anyhow? Wonder if he is barking at us?"

They listened, and as they did so the deep-toned sound of a bell rang out through the forest.

"What in the world is that?" breathed Tony.

"Listen! Listen!" whispered Rob, "don't you hear voices? I do."

Anyone could have heard then, for all at once a weird cry from many voices sounded through the forest, rising above the note of the bell which still continued to ring.

For a few moments these sounds kept up, the cry rising and falling, then suddenly it ceased and the bell stopped too, and all was deathly still.

"We must know what this means," said Rob. "If we want to dodge the dwarfs we must find out where they are. Tony, we are going in the direction of those sounds."

"I would like it better if I had my rifle," said Tony, "but I'm with you Rob, you just lead on."

Rob now started on among the trees, and before they had advanced a hundred yards a bright light was seen ahead, close down to the ground.

Again the bell began its tolling and once more they heard that same strange chant. In the distance a dog barked occasionally, and all these sounds seemed to come from the direction of the light.

"What do you make out of it all, Rob?" whispered Tony at last, when the sounds had died away again. "Don't you think we had better sheer off in some other direction? It seems to me that we are running head on into danger by going toward the light."

"How about Isabella?" asked Rob. "Do you forget her, Tony?"

"No, indeed I don't."

"Well, you can just bet I don't. I'm not going away from this place until I know something more about her than I know now."

A few steps further brought them to a spot where the forest was more open, and looking ahead the boys saw that the light proceeded from the mouth of a cave which seemed to extend in under a ledge of rocks.

Still a little further and they were within fifty feet of the cave and then the bell began to toll again and that wild, weird cry helped to break the stillness.

"Look in there, Tony! Look in there!" whispered Rob, stooping and peering into the mouth of the cave.

It was a startling sight! Tony's wondering exclamation was so loud that Rob feared it might be heard.

In the middle of the cave a bright fire blazed which showed the boys hundreds of dwarfs standing around the walls, armed with spears and clubs.

Behind the fire, standing on a raised platform, was a tall Igorrote in fantastic dress, holding his right hand extended toward the audience. Around his body a huge snake was twined. Its slimy folds passed about the man's neck, and down upon his extended arm, and beyond the hand, the serpent's head was thrust, its beady eyes blinking wickedly, and its forced tongue protruding.

It was an awful sight, and Rob's heart sank at what he saw next.

"Oh, Tony!" he gasped. "Look! Look!"

No need to tell Tony to look! He saw it all as well as Rob, and his eyes were protruding in horror.

Toward the raised platform, upon which the snake charmer stood, four dwarfs were leading a young girl, dragging her toward that outstretched hand.

It was Isabella!

"We must save her!" gasped Rob, and breaking away from Tony, he made a rush for the cave.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CAVE.

If Rob Rollstone had only known it, he was running a fearful risk in thus dashing into the cave where the Aetas were assembled to worship the sacred python.

Serpent worship is part of the religion of these strange little men, who, it is believed, are the original inhabitants of the Philippines.

To them the python is a very sacred thing, and once a year they have a great feast, when a python is sometimes killed and cooked, and all eat of its flesh.

This python is captured one year before the feast. During that year it is fattened on game of any sort that it will eat, and then comes the solemn religious gathering in the sacred cave, when the huge snake is to be given a final meal. On that occasion a young woman is offered to the snake, generally one of the Igorrote race.

If the python eats the young woman it is a sign of good luck, and that the following year will be prosperous for the tribe.

The snake is then set free, and all the Aetas go down into the forests in the lowlands of Luzon to capture another.

If the snake rejects the sacrifice, then it is killed and eaten, for this is a sign of bad luck, and tells the Aetas that the next year will be one of famine.

A new snake is then captured, in either case, the same ceremony being repeated each year, as we have said.

Such was the solemn assemblage into which Rob Rollstone, closely followed by Tony Trumper, had unhesitatingly rushed.

Almost before Aetas had time to realize what was happening, Rob was on the platform striking out right and left, downing a dwarf with every blow, with Tony doing equally good work in the rear.

Isabella saw them coming, and tearing herself free from her captors, sprang to Rob's side.

At the same instant a Filipino, wearing the dress of an officer in Aguinaldo's insurgent army, sprang from some concealment and made a rush for the platform, shouting something in Spanish.

Even in the excitement of battling with the dwarfs Rob and Tony recognized Captain Gwando, Isabella's enemy.

This man, half Igorrote himself, seemed to wield an enormous influence among the native tribes.

"Fly, Rob! You can't save me! Gwando will kill you!" gasped Isabella. "Fly! Fly!"

"With you, but not without you," said Rob, throwing his arm about her. "Back again, Tony. Down with the dwarfs! Down every one who stands in our way!"

If ever there was a display of downright courage it was here.

The python, alarmed by the confusion, hissed and coiled tighter around the Igorrote priest, and the next instant the man was down, writhing in its slimy folds.

Wild cries rang out through the cave as the boys made their final rush.

Captain Gwando tried to push his way to them through the crowd of dwarfs, and probably he would have done it, and that would have been the end of Rob Rollstone and Tony, if something very startling had not just then occurred.

From the roof of the cave, right over the platform, a big bronze bell hung suspended.

Where it came from or how it ever got up there in the mountains among the Aetas Rob Rollstone never knew, but there it was, and it is not necessary to remind the reader that

it was the dismal tolling of this bell which first attracted the attention of the boys to the cave.

Now, suddenly the bell tolled again, one last dismal note—tolled because an earthquake shock shook the cave!

Suddenly it came! The Aetas were thrown this way and that, and down dropped the big bell right on top of the sacred python, crushing its head in.

The cry which went up then rang in Rob Rollstone's ears for many a day to come!

Luckily for Rob, he and Tony and Isabella managed to keep their feet, but Captain Gwando was thrown down on top of the struggling dwarfs.

The next Rob knew they were out of the cave and running through the forest.

There was a heavy rumble, followed by another shock, and a great crack opened in the rocks right in front of them, almost at their feet, closing again with a noise like thunder.

"Gee whiz!" cried Tony, "we are goners! Rob threw his arms around Isabella and above the shrieks of the Aetas, Captain Gwando's voice was heard commanding them to halt, and several shots went whizzing past their heads.

"On, Rob, on!" cried Isabella, piteously. "Don't let me fall into the hands of that man!"

"He don't get you till he kills me!" cried Rob. "Here we go again! What's going to happen next? Is the world coming to an end?"

There was a third shock as they ran, plunging deeper and deeper into the forest, and that was the last of it.

Soon the shouts of the dwarfs grew fainter, and at last they died away altogether.

Still they ran on, with no idea in which direction they were going.

Lost in the forest they were, of course. They knew it, but did not care.

Nothing of all the dangers which might be ahead of them could be worse than what lay behind, and so they kept it up until Isabella declared that she could go no further, and they sat down under a big spreading tree and waited for the dawn, talking over their adventures as the night dragged wearily away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ENEMY SHOWS HIMSELF AGAIN.

"Do you think Captain Gwando will attempt to follow us up?" asked Rob, when sunrise came at last and our friends prepared to make a start.

"I'm sure I cannot tell you," replied Isabella. "I had but little talk with him. When the Aetas carried me away they took me directly to a hut where he was.

"It did not seem to me that he knew I was coming. He asked me again to marry him, and told me that if I refused I should regret it. Of course I did refuse, and I did it so plainly that I don't think he could have had much hope that I would ever yield. Then he grew angry and began to threaten. He told me I would regret it and left the hut. Right after that the Igorrote priest came in and my hands were tied and I was dragged into the cave. I never saw Captain Gwando after that until he sprang out upon us. Oh, Rob, it was a terrible experience. When I saw that horrible snake coiling on the arm of that man——"

"Don't think of it, don't talk any more of it," broke in Rob. "All that belongs to the past. What we have to deal with is the future. Just now we are lost, and want to find ourselves if we can."

"That's what," said Tony, "and we want something to eat, too. 'I'm as hungry as a wolf.'"

Just then the prospect looked pretty dismal, but within ten minutes' time it all changed, for pushing on they suddenly came out of the forest and found themselves at the edge of a precipice looking down upon a scene which filled them with surprise.

They were on the edge of a deep depression surrounded by rocks on all sides.

Down in the sink a mighty river went rushing through a narrow gorge running with amazing rapidity.

There on the bank toward them as they looked down stood a substantial hut, looking very much like their own.

"Hello! What's all this!" cried Rob. "It looks just like our valley, only there's the river and the break in the mountains. No, it can't be."

"Say, that's our house all right," declared Tony.

"I'm blest if it doesn't look it!" said Rob, "but it stands just about where it ought to stand—where it used to stand, I mean. Don't you forget, Tony, that our house went on a sailing excursion night before last."

"It's our valley!" cried Isabella, suddenly. "I know it by a dozen landmarks! Look there, Rob, and there and there!"

Rapidly Isabella pointed out one landmark after another, all very familiar to the boys.

It was certainly the valley, but the water had ceased to come over the ledges on the opposite side.

As Rob studied the situation, he saw that the earthquake must have been at work here.

The rock walls at both ends had been split, opening a passage for the water.

The rushing river was their own stream, where they had dug the gold. How the hut came to drift back to a point within a few yards of its old location and their ground, Rob never knew, but there it was and there they found it, when after a great deal of difficulty they discovered a place where they could go down the rocks into the valley, and made their way across the mud-covered flat.

The hut had grounded in an upright position, and did not seem to be injured a bit.

"Hooray! Here we are home again!" shouted Tony, pushing open the door and rushing in. "Rob, this is great! Nothing disturbed—but oh, how wet! Well, it's a blame sight better than no house at all."

It took Tony ten minutes to calm down, he was so excited, and in the meantime Rob and Isabella made straight for the closet where the gold had been hidden.

It was all there, undisturbed.

"We are safe!" cried Rob. "Our fortune isn't swept away yet, but I tell you what it is, Isabella, we can't stay here!"

"Not an hour longer than we have to!" declared the practical girl. "Captain Gwando will be after us, I'm perfectly sure of it. As for the Aetas, they are a cruel, revengeful race. I know them well. We were indirectly the means of killing the sacred snake, and they will surely kill us if they get the chance."

"I wonder if your idea is the same as mine," said Rob. "I'm thinking about a raft."

"The very words that were on my lips!" exclaimed Isabella. "The earthquake has opened a way for us, and it is no great distance to the sea. Let us build a raft, load on the gold and such provisions as we can and go right along wherever the flood carries us. We are pretty sure to strike some settlement on the coast where we shall be safe."

"Nothing could suit me better," replied Rob. "Come, Toney, what do you say?"

"Let's do it," said Tony. "We are rich if we can only get what we've got out of this place. Let's do it, by all means."

This decision meant the beginning of lots of work.

There were plenty of trees in the woods and plenty of tools in the hut.

Rob and Tony could both handle an ax well, and they went right to work wood chopping.

There was need of haste for more reasons than one. Besides the fear of an attack, it was easy to see that the rushing stream was rapidly falling. In a short time it might not be possible to get out of the valley on the raft.

The boys worked all the morning felling trees and cutting logs, and in the afternoon they bound them together, using the rope, of which there was a great plenty in the hut, and by four o'clock the raft was complete.

Four long poles were cut to use for guiding the clumsy craft, and when all was ready the boys got aboard and ran the raft down to the hut.

They had a lot of trouble in making a landing, but with Isabella's help they succeeded at last in tying up to a big tree.

"This is business, Rob!" exclaimed Isabella. "Oh, what fellows you Yankees are! If you get possession of the Philippines, as I believe you will, you will make them the richest islands in the Indian archipelago, and I doubt if there are a dozen planters on Luzon who will not welcome the change."

"Leave us alone! We'll get there in time!" said Rob, "but just now we've got to get our stuff on board, for we want to lie off as soon as we can."

It was quite a task to load on the gold, and after it was all on the raft and so placed that the logs were properly balanced, the provisions were brought on board.

The great weight sunk the top row of logs almost to the water's edge, but Rob had taken the weight fully into consideration in constructing his raft, and as the bags were firmly lashed to the logs, he felt that there was not much danger of losing their load.

All was now ready for a start, and Isabella had gone back into the house for some trifling thing which had been forgotten, when she was suddenly startled by a loud shout from Tony.

"Here they come! Here they come!" he cried. "Quick! The Igorrotes! Captain Gwando! By gracious, we've either got to run or fight!"

Isabella ran out of the hut and looking up stream saw another raft almost as big as their own come shooting out of the woods.

There were six Igorrotes standing on it, and in front of them was Captain Gwando.

A wild shout went up as they caught sight of the girl, and Gwando threw up a rifle and fired at the boys.

"We are lost!" gasped Isabella. "Oh, Rob! what shall we do?"

"Don't go!" cried Rob, seizing the frightened girl by the hand. "Here, jump aboard! Cut her loose, Tony. We've got the start anyhow. Let them catch us if they can!"

Tony seized a hatchet and cut the rope the instant Rob sprang aboard.

Then the big raft swung out into the current, while a

shower of Igorrote arrows and shots from Gwando's rifle flew after them as they went rushing down the stream.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RACE OF THE RAFTS.

"No danger yet. We are a long way out of range."

"Yes, and we are gaining on them, Tony," replied Rob. "Don't you be one bit alarmed."

"Pooh! Who's afraid?" cried Tony, contemptuously. "Haven't we got rifles—three of them—against one? What do we care for these niggers, with their bows and arrows? Not a rap."

"Don't sneer at the Igorrote arrows, Tony," said Isabella. "They are all poisoned and to be hit with one means almost certain death."

"Is that a fact?" asked Rob, with a good deal of concern.

"Yes, it is," replied Isabella. "Of course I don't know that Gwando will let them use poisoned arrows. He would not mind killing you, but I'm very certain he don't want to kill me. Still, I don't want to be hit with them, poisoned or not poisoned, I'm sure of that."

"Same here," said Rob, "but I don't think there is any danger just yet. They've stopped firing because it is no use. A lucky thing, though, that we found those extra rifles in the loft. We may need them if we get into close quarters, but I still have hopes that we shall outsail the enemy. Isn't the raft doing fine?"

It was indeed so, considering the way it was loaded down. It was making far better time than Captain Gwando's raft, which was a very clumsy affair.

But although he had been distanced, Gwando showed no disposition to give up the chase.

He stood at the bow, rifle in hand, looking grimly ahead at the other raft.

What the next few moments were to bring forth neither he nor Rob could tell.

Right ahead of the forward raft lay the cliffs, broken and split by the force of the earthquake shock.

Where the stream had originally run under the rocks it now passed between two towering walls.

Out West the place would have been called a canyon, but it was a very narrow one, so narrow, in fact, that as Rob stood there looking ahead, he was almost doubtful if they were going to be able to get through.

"It must follow the course of the old stream, Tony," he said. "There can't be any doubt that it will bring us out at the camel rock."

"Don't see how there can," replied Tony. "But after that, what? I'm thinking that this business is navigating in the dark."

"There is surely a vent for all this water somewhere," said Isabella. "Remember, it is no great distance out of these mountains, anyway. I don't pretend to know very much about

geography of the interior of Luzon, but I believe we shall find that this stream empties into the Mandero river. I only wish I had asked my uncle. He would have known."

"Did you ask Captain Gwando about your uncle while you talked with him in the hut?" inquired Rob.

"Yes, but I could get no satisfaction. He professed not to know, and I don't believe he does. My opinion is that my uncle is still in the mountains. He is, as I told you, a very singular character, and often takes these long rambles alone. Sometimes he has been gone for months, but he always turned up all right again in the end."

"Steady!" cried Tony. "We are going in between the rocks now."

As the raft shot in between the cliffs the boys looked up at them awe-stricken at this example of the mighty power which nature can exert.

The rocks were broken and seamed in every direction.

Great jagged masses hung threateningly over them, seemingly ready to fall on their heads at any moment.

On they flew, and in a few moments a wild shout from behind told them that the other raft had entered the rift.

"They've picked up on us a little," said Rob, looking back. "They are considerably nearer than they were a few moments ago. This won't do. If they keep on gaining we shall have to part with some of our ballast, even if it is gold."

Suddenly Gwando set up a shout. His voice reverberated through the rift like thunder, echoing and re-echoing again and again.

"What does he say?" asked Rob.

"The same old cry," replied Isabella. "If we don't stop he will kill you both, and—— Great Heavens, Rob! Oh, look there!"

Suddenly a big mass of rock loosened overhead and came whirling down into the rift.

Rob's raft had already passed the place in safety, but Captain Gwando's was right upon it.

Breathlessly they watched the rock descend.

The Igorrotes, seeing their danger, set up a wild shout and tried to stop the raft, but were not able to do it.

As for Captain Gwando, he sprang into the water just in time to save himself, for the rock struck the raft, smashing it to pieces.

Whether any of the Igorrotes were killed or not the boys could not tell, for at the same instant their own raft went whirling around a bend in the rift, and all that lay behind them was lost to view.

"Hooray!" cried Tony. "That settles their hash!"

"And what's our fate to be?" exclaimed Rob. "Here we are at last!"

Like a flash they emerged from the rift close by the camel rock.

Of what lay beyond the next bend in the stream the boys knew nothing.

Around it they went whirling. A mighty wall of rock rose before them, against which the water was hurling itself, splashing and foaming with fearful force.

"We are lost!" cried Isabella. "An opening there must be, but it is probably too small for the raft to pass through.

But there was no such thing as stopping now.

On flew the raft toward the fatal rocks.

CHAPTER XXII.

ISABELLA FINDS HER UNCLE.

"Hold hard there! Bend your heads low, boys! There is an opening under the wall, and through it we've got to go!"

Isabella took it all as coolly as if the raft had been sailing on a calm lake of a summer's evening instead of rushing on toward what seemed to be certain death to all on board.

As Rob Rollstone looked at the towering wall of rock against which the water was dashing with fearful force, he saw that Isabella was right—there was an opening about midway in the wall, and toward it the water seemed to center.

It was narrow—not so wide as the raft it seemed to him then, and, of course, the water almost choked it up.

"We can never get through there in the world," groaned Tony. "This is the worst job of all."

"Lie low, I tell you!" cried Isabella, throwing herself flat on the raft at that moment and holding on for dear life.

There was no time to be lost. The boys instantly followed her example.

All in a moment the raft was in the ruck of this miniature maelstrom.

Rob set his teeth and clutched the logs, expecting every instant to get his death blow from those cruel rocks overhead.

But no! It was not to be! The raft struck, swerved off and then struck again, lodging in the opening, but there was still space overhead.

It was an awful moment. The water was all over them then, and they might just as well have been in it as far as keeping dry was concerned.

Rob put his hand up to feel the head room.

There were the rocks not over two inches above them as they lay.

If they should happen to come against a lower place nothing could save them from instant death.

Of course there was no talking then—they could not have made themselves heard.

One awful moment of suspense and the raft worked its way through.

Instantly they were in darkness flying on underground.

"This is another hole in the wall," thought Rob. "This soft limestone rocks is full of them. Well, we've got to make the best of it. I don't believe it will be for long."

Almost as the thought crossed his mind they ran out into the open.

It was another valley long and wide.

The danger was all over now, for here the water had spread itself, forming a lake which was calm enough excepting just there where the stream issued from under the rocks.

"Hooray! Hooray!" bawled Tony, springing to his feet.

"Safe enough now. Let Gwando and his dwarfs catch us here if they can."

Rob was up a moment later and helped Isabella to rise.

As they looked around they saw that the lake had spread itself over the entire valley.

There was a forest all under water on their right, while on the left were innumerable islands marking the points of higher land.

"It's just the same here as it was in our valley; I'm sure of it," declared Rob. "There was nothing but a stream here before the water broke."

"That's what," added Tony; "but say, look over there! See that house on top of the rock?"

"Why, it is a hut, sure enough," said Isabella. "Who can have settled in here?"

"Another of your English gold miners probably," said Rob. "Like enough the same man who worked our mines."

"We want to get to that hut—that's all," said Tony. "I'm as wet as a drowned rat, and it won't do us a bit of harm to stop and dry off before we look for a way out of this valley."

"Get your pole, Tony, and we'll try to work her over there," said Rob. "I don't believe it is very deep."

Fortunately the poles had been lashed down to the raft and were safe.

The boys each drew one out of the lashings, and when Rob thrust his down into the water he found to his great satisfaction that it was only about five feet deep.

All danger was now over for the time being.

"If we can't do any better we can get out and walk," laughed Rob. "Pole her ashore, Tony. We'll make for the island. Hello! There's a man!"

A tall, elderly man had just stepped out of the hut as Rob exclaimed.

Isabella gave a cry of joy. The man threw up his hands and ran down to the water's edge, shouting something in Spanish, to which Isabella excitedly replied.

"Your uncle, of course?" said Rob. "Well, I am glad of this."

"Yes, yes! Oh, thank Heaven!" exclaimed Isabella. "We are safe now. No man knows the interior of Luzon better than he does."

She broke off and began an excited conversation with the man in Spanish as the raft neared the shore.

"He has been penned up here ever since the flood," she explained. "He knew nothing of the burning of the house up in the valley. He thought I was still safe in the care of the native servants as he left me. Don't fear him, Rob, however gruff he may appear. He is a good man."

A most excellent man Senor Esquivado may have been, but he was certainly a very reticent one, and none too fond of Americans—as it turned out.

Still he spoke pleasantly to the boys when Isabella introduced them as the raft neared the shore, but as he understood no English and it all had to be done by translating, talking came hard, and there was not much of it done.

Through Isabella the boys learned that Senor Esquivado was pursuing his botanical investigation in the mountains,

and chance led him down into this valley the night before the flood came.

The hut he declared had been built by the English miner, who worked at several places along this creek.

"It is most fortunate that you came, boys," said Senor Esquivado, through Isabella, as they talked matters over. "My provisions are all gone, and I'm afraid I should have starved before the chance should come to get away."

"But can we escape now?" asked Rob. "Is there any way out of here?"

"Certainly there is," was the reply. "There is a path over the mountains which takes you down into the Igorrote country on the other side, and there is also a way out by the creek which runs under the hill, forming the other end of the valley by just such a passage as the one by which you entered, only it is wider and higher, and there will be no difficulty whatever in getting through it. Just beyond in the next valley the creek runs into the Mandero river, which takes us to the ocean. From its mouth we can walk to the town of Balem, where the coast steamer stops on its way to Manila twice a month."

Here was good news. It looked very much as if all trouble was over.

Rob was for going directly forward, but Senor Esquivado insisted that they should wait until morning as he had his botanical specimens to get in shape and numerous stuffed birds, which he had collected in the mountains to repack.

Of course Rob could not refuse. All needed a change of clothes, Isabella as much as the rest.

In the hut, which was comfortably furnished like the other one, there were two or three old suits of clothes hanging up which had been left behind by the English miner.

The boys changed to these, and Isabella, selecting one, followed their example, and their once saturated garments were laid out to dry.

Before sun went down Isabella was able to resume her proper garments. A fire was built and supper cooked, and all settled down to pass a quiet night on the island.

But it was not to be. More trouble was in store for them.

This night was to prove one of the most exciting ever experienced by Rob Rollstone, as we shall now proceed to show.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST ATTACK OF THE DWARFS.

"At what time do we start to-morrow, Rob?" asked Tony, meeting Rob outside the hut at a little after midnight.

It was an oppressively hot night; not a breath of air was stirring; it seemed to grow hotter and hotter as the night advanced.

Low rumblings had been heard from time to time, with an occasional tremble, which went to show that the earthquake had not altogether retired from business.

Neither of the boys could sleep. As for Isabella, she retired to a room in the loft and had not been seen since sundown.

Senor Esquivado lay stretched upon a bench outside the hut in a deep sleep. His cases were all packed and everything was on the raft ready for a start.

Just now Tony had been down for a swim, but he declared that the water was almost boiling, and he had not enjoyed his bath a bit.

"I'm all ready to get out of here right now, Rob," he remarked, as he came nearer. "You don't answer my question. What time do we start?"

"Don't know. Whenever Isabella and her uncle are ready, I suppose. I was watching those black things over on the rocks across the valley. They seem to move."

It was about half a mile across the valley, and although it was bright moonlight, it was, of course, next to impossible to make out any small objects so far away.

Tony took one long look, and gave one of his characteristic exclamations:

"Gee whiz, Rob! how long has that been going on. I'd like to know?"

"What? What do you make out of it, Tony?"

"What do I make out of it? Why, it's a lot of dwarfs climbing down over the rocks. That's what it is, sure! Can't you see?"

"I thought it was the Aetas," replied Rob, quietly. "I guess we'd better wake up Senor Esquivado and call Isabella. It's time we were on the move."

"You bet! I can see them plain now, and there are some Igorrotes among them. See, there comes a big fellow down over the rocks this very moment. It's Captain Gwando after us again."

"You bet your life it is. Shall I wake up the senor?"

"Yes, I think you better, and at the same time I'll call Isabella, but we ought to be safe enough. I don't see how the Aetas are going to get through the water. It must be over their heads."

"No, indeed it isn't, Rob, the water is falling steadily. It isn't more than three feet deep at the foot of the hill right here. That's why I asked you when we were going to start, for it is my opinion that the raft won't carry us if we don't start mighty soon."

"That settles it! Wake up there, senor! Wake up!" shouted Rob, leaving Tony to shake up the old bontanist, Rob ran into the hut and soon got an answer out of Isabella, who afterward declared that she was in a sound sleep.

"Come right down!" he shouted. "The water is falling; the Aetas are coming! We must not lose a moment in getting off!"

Isabella was down inside of five minutes. Senor Esquivado, who happened to have a first-rate night glass about him, was in a great state of excitement by that time.

"It's that scoundrel Gwando! I can see him plainly," he declared. "He is leading the dwarfs, and there are as many as a hundred of them."

Rob took the glass and had his look.

It was undoubtedly Captain Gwando or some one who looked very much like him. At the head of a band of fully a hundred dwarfs and Igorrotes he was advancing steadily through the

water. In some places it seemed to be up almost to the necks of the dwarfs; in others there was apparently little or no depth to it, but in no place did it seem to offer any obstruction to their steady advance.

"There is not a moment to be lost," declared Rob. "Is everything on board, senor?"

Through Isabella the old man replied that he was all ready to go, and they all hurried down to the raft.

But it was not to be so easy a start. The water was particularly shallow close in to the shore, and the heavily laden raft had already grounded.

Rob and Tony pulled off their shoes and stockings and jumped right in, pulling and tugging, while Isabella and Senor Esquivado pushed with the poles.

It was no use. They could not budge it. Meanwhile, Gwando and his band were drawing nearer and nearer.

"Keep at it! Keep at it, Tony!" cried Rob. "Isabella, you can use a rifle and so can your uncle, of course. Prepare to defend us while we keep on working. Once we can get her started it will be all right."

None too soon was the order given.

A shout from Gwando brought a shower of arrows flying around them a few moments later.

"I've got you now! You'll have to surrender!" shouted the Filipino, and at the head of his dwarfs Gwando rushed on through the water, heedless of the rifle shots.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Hurrah! She floats!" Rob Rollstone's mighty shouts echoed back from the hills.

The raft was off at last. He and Tony leaped aboard, and as the clumsy craft was caught in the current, each of the boys seized a rifle and joined in the attack on Gwando and his dwarfs.

Several of the latter were seen to fall and the rest now began to scatter.

In vain Gwando tried to rally them, but it was of no use.

Then in a moment the raft was caught in the swifter current of the channel, and went on down the valley with considerable speed.

The last they saw of Captain Gwando he had landed on the island, and was looking after them through a glass.

"That ends Gwando, Rob," said Isabella, in a tone of deep satisfaction. "He was able to get back among the hills and rally the Aetas, but he can follow us no further. From his persecutions I am now safe."

On they moved down the valley with ever-increasing rapidity. Soon they approached the cliffs where the opening beneath worn by the water in former times could be distinctly seen.

Now the current began to gather strength, and the raft flew on faster.

Just before they entered the underground passage a noise like thunder was heard, and there was a back set to the water, which brought it swirling up around the raft.

"What's that?" cried Tony.

Senor Esquivado flung his arm about Isabella and turned as pale as death.

"We must stop or we are lost!" he cried, in Spanish. "Work away from the cave, boys! Work away!"

Too late for that! It could not be done! Into the cave the raft would have to go!

"It is the crater of an old volcano in there," explained Senor Esquivado. "I have been through it many times. It is open overhead, and up to the level of the stream is filled with water, but this earthquake makes me fearful of the worst. Feel of the water, boys."

Rob put his hand in and drew it out in a hurry, for the water was scalding hot.

"An eruption in the old crater, I suppose," he said, for the roaring had increased until they could scarcely hear themselves speak.

But what ever it was, through the cave they must go, for nothing could stop the progress of the raft now.

"Hold hard, Tony. Never say die till you have to!" cried Rob, as the raft shot in under the overhanging rocks.

The instant they passed in they knew what they had to encounter.

There was a ruddy glow ahead of them, and the roaring was like that of a thousand furnaces, while the heat was terrific—it seemed as though the very clothes they wore must go into a blaze.

"May Heaven protect us!" cried Senor Esquivado, throwing his arms about his niece.

These were the last words spoken, for a turn in the cave showed them the worst.

Right ahead the water was boiling like a pot, and beyond flames and red-hot stones were shooting upward into a natural chimney, forced through the rocks above them ages before.

And it was through this that the raft must go; through it they did go, and it was an experience that neither Rob Rollstone nor Tony will ever forget.

With scalded faces and hands and burning clothing, they ran out of that gantlet of fire and were safe, for a moment later they were out of the cave altogether, and not seriously injured, either, floating down a peaceful stream which shortly brought them to the Mandero river, and this, in turn, brings our story to an end.

For with the arrival at the river, the startling adventures of our boy gold hunters in the Philippines came to a close.

The raft ran down the Mandero to the sea, and there the boys made oars, and as it was perfectly calm, rowed on to Balem, where they were kindly received by Senor Esquivado's friends.

A week later, leaving Isabella behind them, Rob and Tony took the steamer for Manila, which city they found in the hands of Admiral Dewey and General Merritt, and then for the first time they heard that the Spanish war was over, and that victory had come to the United States.

After some consideration Tony reported to his regiment. It was his duty, and Tony had no desire to do anything else.

Rob went with him and told his story to the captain.

"Humph!" replied the captain, "this is a strange yarn. Still I happen to know that Rob Ricketts had a large mole on his back, for I was present when the doctor examined him at the time he enlisted. How about your back, young man?"

"You can look at my back and see," replied Rob, and the captain did so. Finding no mole he was inclined to listen to Rob, and it ended in our hero receiving his discharge as being a non-enlisted man.

Then Rob returned to America, but Tony, from choice, remained at Manila in the service of Uncle Sam, and it is safe to say that he is the richest soldier in Merritt's force, although this is not generally known.

For Rob disposed of the gold to a Manila banker, and it brought over four hundred thousand dollars.

Tony's share is partly with the banker on deposit, and partly transferred to a New York bank, where it is perfectly safe.

After a pleasant voyage Rob reached San Francisco, and crossing the continent at length arrived at Buffalo, where he took the train for Brownsburg, dressed like a gentleman, with greenbacks and drafts and letters of credit on San Francisco and New York in his pocket, amounting to two hundred thousand dollars.

Not the old Rob! Oh, no! Here was one rolling-stone which had gathered moss!

And the moss was needed, for when Rob reached home he found that Captain Stutts, his stepfather, had run away and cheated his creditors, and Rob's mother and Amy were just about ready to go to the poorhouse.

Think of their joy at seeing Rob come back home a rich man.

But this only happened a few years ago.

Rob has already left Brownsburg and taken his mother and Amy to Buffalo, where he has fitted them up in a comfortable home.

Rob says he is going back to the Philippines after more gold, but we strongly suspect that Isabella is the main attraction.

It is probable that he will go, and if he does, we shouldn't wonder if he came back one day with a wife.

Of course he will come back a richer man if he takes care of himself, for there is lots of gold in the Philippines, and no one knows better where it can be found than ROB ROLLSTONE.

Next week's issue will contain "DRIVEN INTO THE STREET; OR, THE FATE OF AN OUTCAST BOY," by Richard R. Montgomery.

SPECIAL NOTICE. All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 45 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 79, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 91, 92 to 94, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 109 to 111, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 139, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 192, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 277, 294. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

A rat the other day stole a one-thousand-dollar bill from C. H. Landell's pharmacy, Avenue D and Thirty-second street, Bayonne, N. J. The bill was received by Mr. Landell too late to be deposited in the bank, so he placed it in his waistcoat pocket and made a number of his friends feel ill by showing it to them. When he awoke the next day the bill was gone. There was no sign of burglars, and a thorough search of the store was fruitless. In the store-room, however, the druggist saw a rat dart into a hole. While plugging up the hole he caught sight of something green and fished out his one-thousand-dollar bill. Then his heart beat normally.

The diversion dam which is to be constructed across Lost River at the Gap, in Oregon, will mean the passing of the famous Lost River sucker. This sucker, or mullet, which is its right name, has been famous along Lost River ever since the white man knew the country. Each spring the suckers have been wont to run up the river to their spawning grounds about Bonanza, and during this time the people living along the banks have caught them by the thousands. When the dam is completed and the waters of the Tule Lake dry up these fish will have no place in which to remain during most of the year, and as the river is to be diverted into the Klamath River what few of them happen to be above this dam when it is finished and the water turned out of the old channer will lose themselves in the waters of the Klamath and lakes of this country.

Another experiment in the line of community housekeeping is to be tried, this time in a suburb of Berlin. A large house, containing thirty rooms, situated in extensive grounds of twenty acres, has been rented by a community of mutual acquaintances, among whom are both married and single. A monthly rent of from fifteen to twenty marks will be levied for each room occupied. The housekeeping will be in common, and the kitchen also. One lady and one gentleman will be elected to take charge of all the concerns of the house. These officers will be changed weekly. A bill of fare and all other matters of interest connected with the establishment will be posted up in the hall. For food a daily charge of one mark will be made, this to be increased later. There will be a good library, and a common drawing room, writing room, working room and dining room. Arrangements are also being made for a common playground and garden. The community will consist first of forty persons, mostly engaged in literary and artistic pursuit.

A dry battery is a form of open circuit battery, in which the solutions, by a mass of zinc oxychloride, gypsum, or by gelatinous masses such as gelatinous silica or glue jelly, are made practically solid. Zamboni's dry-pile is termed a dry battery. It is made of discs of paper silvered or tinned on one side, and sprinkled on the other with binocide of manganese; sometimes as many as 2,000 of such couples are piled up in a glass tube and pressed together with two rods which form the terminals. They maintain a high potential difference, but having a very high resistance and slight polarization capacity, give exceedingly small quantities. There are various compounds for charging dry batteries, but the process of making them is kept secret by the inventors.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

"What's that noise?" asked the visitor in the apartment house. "Probably some one in the dentist's apartments on the floor below getting a tooth out." "But this seemed to come from the floor above." "Ah, then it's probably the Popleys' baby getting a tooth in."

"What a very affecting piece, my dear," remarked the husband, as they returned from the suburban theatre the other night. "I suppose there wasn't a dry eye in the house." "I observed, however," said the wife, "that there seemed to be the usual number of dry throats."

There are but few who would not appear a trifle bored if compelled to listen a second time to a sermon. This weariness might be somewhat alleviated, however, if repeaters of sermons would bear in mind the remark of a little daughter of a preacher who was asked the question: "Does your father ever preach the same sermon twice?" After a moment's contemplation she replied: "Yes, but I think he hollers in different places."

The new minister had preached eloquently on the wisdom of God and His goodness in providing for us according to our needs. "It is the same with the flowers," he said. "Sunshine for your geraniums and heliotrope, a shady corner for your fuchsia." The little woman who had listened intently came forward to thank him. "I profited so much by your sermon," she exclaimed. The minister beamed. "I never knew before," she went on, "just what was the matter with my fuchsias."

A woman went before the Magistrate and modestly inquired: "Your Honor, can I have a warrant for the arrest of my husband? He boxed my ears yesterday." "Certainly, ma'am," replied the Judge. "I will make out a warrant on the ground of assault and personal injuries." "Can I fetch the warrant in about a month?" "In a month? Why won't you take it at once?" "Please, Your Honor, when my husband slapped my face I took my rolling pin and hit him on the head, so that he had to be removed to the hospital. The doctors say, however, that he will be on his legs again in a month."

To show that, though she occupies a prominent place in the "small set" of the town in which she lives, she is of a truly domestic nature, a young woman of Cleveland pitched in to help get dinner, in the absence of the cook, who was ill. The flurried housemaid, who was struggling with a refractory coffee machine, confessed to her mistress that she had forgotten to wash the lettuce. "Never mind, Clara," said the young matron. "Don't get excited. Keep right on with the coffee and I'll wash the lettuce. Do you know where the cook keeps the soap?"

PADDY'S EXPEDITION

By Col. Ralph R. Detective
PRICE

The last days of the great Sepoy war; or, Traitors at hand.

One by one the English troops had all the important cities and fortifications which were seized by the revolting soldiery, and only up in the hill country were there any signs of British rule.

The native princes and their cohorts were prompt to fall away from the standard of rebellion; or, The Fate of a man; or, The strong would be driven into the ocean from whence they no longer hold sway over the land where they numbered the strangers a hundred to one.

Nana Sahib, the detested chief of the cruel, inhuman monster as he was to England, so far escaped capture, although the English had done all in their power to entrap him.

City after city had fallen before him; or, Ten Hours and in each and every town it was reported that Nana Sahib was in command.

But when the swarthy Hindoo chief after the fight was ended, the most notorious of the Old Trappers was not to be found.

And so at last the English officers began to wonder, or, The Boy and his red-handed rajah with the Flying Dutchman, and other intractable creatures of legend.

But when, up in the hill country, one of the mns attached to Havelock's command encountered a body of fugitives, but which a sharp attack dis- PRICE 5 CENT, a good-sized army, the Englishmen came to the Northwest. that the wild and broken country had been selected for their last stand, and that it was more likely that the fugitive rajah, Nana Sahib in person, might be in command, since the leader who was handling the insurgents displayed most excellent generalship.

He had selected the crest of the Hindu pass for a defensive position, and it was naturally a strong one.

Upon the hill at the head of the pass an earthwork had been thrown up and some heavy guns placed in position, as the British soldiers discovered to their cost, for upon their first discovery of the enemy, thinking that it was only a small party, they had dashed boldly to the attack and had been repulsed with heavy loss.

Havelock himself was not far off, and messengers were at once dispatched to inform him of the unexpected resistance which the advance had encountered.

The general at once hurried to the front.

For the foe to make a stand, concentrate his forces and offer battle, was exactly what the British commander wanted, so at one decisive blow he might end the struggle.

He had become wearied of following a foe who always fled and never fought, and yet was capable of doing considerable mischief.

When Havelock reached the front and had examined carefully the enemy's position, he perceived that the earthwork on the hill which commanded the pass was in reality the key to the position—was as admirable a piece of engineering as the eyes of the old soldier had ever looked upon.

A reconnoissance revealed that the enemy not only had plenty of guns mounted, but also a large army to resist an attack.

In a council of war then held it was the unanimous opinion that it would be unwise to assault until the earthwork was at least partially reduced, and a breach made by which the troops could enter it.

Heavy siege guns were therefore placed in position, and with the rising of the next day's sun a furious cannonading began all along the line.

The enemy replied vigorously, but the superior weight of the English metal told, as well as the superior skill of the gunners, and by noon not only were the great part of the Sepoy guns dismounted, but a good-sized breach was made in the wall.

The general then gave orders to prepare for an assault, but, as sharp skirmishing had been going on all the morning, Havelock fixed the hour for the advance at four in the afternoon, thus to allow the men time for rest.

To further stimulate the Britons, some of the foes who had been captured in the morning engagement reported that Nana Sahib was in command, and that, in order to encourage his followers, he had sworn a sacred oath either to beat back the infidel dogs, or else to die upon the spot.

That the coming assault would be a sanguinary one was the opinion of all, and even cautious Havelock had said that if any soldier had prayers to say, or preparations to make in the event of death being nigh, it would be well to attend to them, for the struggle promised to be as fierce a one as India had ever seen.

Now in the army was a regiment composed almost entirely of Irishmen—wild, reckless, desperate fellows, the plague of the general's life in camp, but his delight in the field.

The biggest rascal of all this collection of choice spirits was one Paddy Burke, a County Clare lad.

At the prospect of warm work ahead Paddy had taken the precaution to drain his canteen of strong spirits which he had purchased from a native on the march.

"Anyhow, the cratur shan't be wasted," he observed.

The fiery liquor at once mounted to his head and so inflamed it that he found it impossible to keep still.

The wild idea came into his noddle that it would be a "foine" thing to pay a visit to the fort above and take a look at the inside of it through the breach which the big guns had made.

So off he set with his musket on his shoulder, and without attracting particular attention he managed to reach the earthwork.

The Sepoys, busily engaged in preparing to resist the expected attack, had paid but little attention to placing sentries, and the soldier who was to guard the breach was seated upon a gun near by half-asleep when Paddy appeared.

The martial ardor of the Irishman was at once excited, so, clubbing his musket, he advanced upon the astonished Hindoo with a wild Irish yell.

The Sepoy sprung up, only to be stricken down with a broken crown.

Some of his comrades, alarmed, came rushing up, sword in hand, but the bold Irishman, standing in the breach, yelling at the top of his lungs, with his clubbed musket easily kept them at bay and cracked the skulls of those who were unwary enough to come within reach of his terrible weapon.

This novel sight and noise attracting the attention of some English soldiers who were making observations of the place, they hurried towards the breach, and just as fifteen or twenty Sepoys were about to drive Paddy through the opening, these reinforcements reached him, and a lively skirmish at once took place.

The Britons held their ground easily, and by fives and tens their comrades began to come in to their assistance.

(Continued on page 32)

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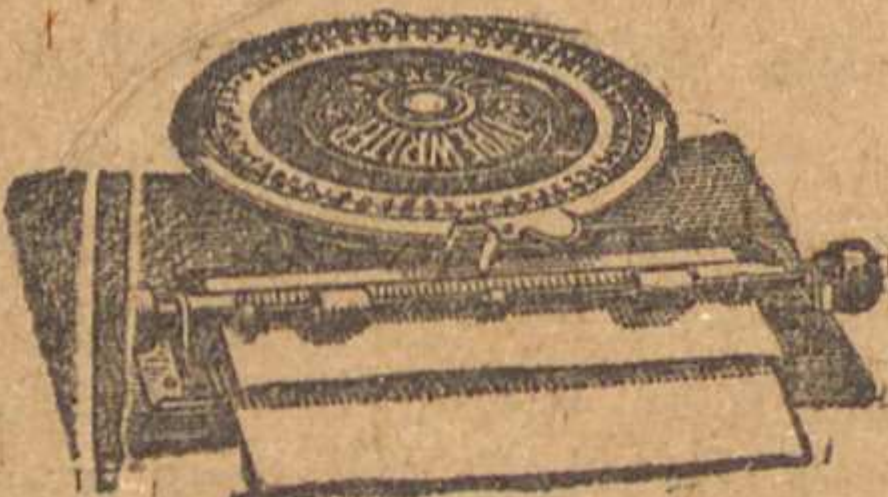
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(Continued from page 29)

The Sepoys at length were beaten back within the works, but were pursued by the now infuriated mob at their heels, and when Havelock and his staff arrived on the scene the fight actually was over, and Hindu Pass a captured position.

Havelock was amazed.

The fort which he had calculated would take two or three hours' hard fighting to capture, and which he feared would cost the lives of at least a thousand men, had yielded almost without bloodshed.

But Nana Sahib had not been in command.

Such a flagrant breach of discipline as this could not be overlooked, and so poor Paddy Burke was court-martialed.

The charge—"Capturing a fort without orders."

Paddy pleaded guilty, but swore by all that was holy if they would let them go this time he would never take another fort all by himself while he lived.

The affair was too ridiculous, and Paddy got off with a caution never to commit such a breach of discipline again.

A TERRIBLE CHASE

Night came upon us long before we expected it, and, as we had wandered many miles from the ship, it would have been unwise of us to have ventured to return without any knowledge of our destination, so we made up a large fire and contents ourselves to spend the night under the trees.

Having loaded our guns to be prepared in the event of a sudden surprise, we made a bed of the fallen autumn leaves, and lay down to sleep till morning.

The whole night I was haunted with frightful dreams. I was lost in the jungles of India, I thought, beneath a broiling sun, pursued by a horde of wild, roaring tigers. The terror of being overtaken robbed me of the power to move almost.

I heard the same savage monsters break through bush and bramble, every instant gaining upon me. I felt their warm breath against the back of my neck as they came snorting up behind me; then, with a violent effort of desperation, I broke the awful spell that held me powerless, and ran forward. But my legs became paralyzed, and I fell forward on my face.

At the moment I had given myself up for lost the scene changed, and I found myself tied to a stake, surrounded by a host of murderous negroes, who were piling up wood for my destruction. I watched them in silent terror; I knew not how I had come there, or for what reason, but everything seemed terribly real to me. I saw one of them thrust a flaming torch amidst the wood, I heard it cracking as the flames spread through it, I was surrounded in a dense volume of smoke, and I writhed and shrieked as the tongues of fire raised blisters on my flesh.

My senses were leaving me when the scene changed again, in that miraculous manner dreams have of transferring you from one thing to another, and I was speeding up a mighty hill to escape a legion of strange, wild-looking animals that were pursuing me, such animals as are supposed to have existed thousands of years before the supposed creation of the world.

In my blind horror and hurry to escape them, I did not see where I was going, until I found myself on the verge of a tremendous mountain. I tried to check myself, but too late, and I made a clutch at something as I fell over the giddy height. I then awoke with a fright, and found that I had seized hold of Frank's nose.

"Hallo!" he shouted, leaping to his feet, and looking round for his gun, "what was that?"

"I was dreaming, and laid hold of your nose in my sleep," I explained.

"You look scared," he said, gazing and stretching himself. "Hallo! here's a happy thought!"

"What?"

"I have just thought how to lengthen the days."

"How?"

"By doing as I do, stretch every night and morning."

After the dreadful nightmares I had suffered, I thought it was cruel of him to inflict me with such an outrageous joke, and set about getting breakfast. The embers of our fire were still smouldering, and with a few dry sticks I soon wafted it into a blaze. We made a substantial meal of the preserved meat and biscuits we had brought with us. I warmed some water in my shot-flask, and put some rum to it, which was a very acceptable beverage on a sharp windy morning.

"We had better get back to the ship now," said Frank; "we may be wanted to be sent out with provisions for the exploring party who started yesterday."

We had been traveling for about two hours when it struck us that we must be going the wrong way, as the further we went the less we saw of the dreary, wintry aspect we had left behind us. In fact, we were getting into a splendid country, where everything was fresh and green.

"It's my belief," said Frank, sitting on a grassy mound, "that we are in some part of North America."

"Very likely," I answered, "but if that's the case, where is the ship lying?"

"About two hundred miles from Baffin's Bay, and nowhere near Cape Isabella, where we were supposed to lay up when the exploring party set out."

"It is peculiar that there should be such a difference in the weather at such short distances."

"What difference?"

"Why, it is almost summer here, and a few miles away, where the ship lies, it is the very depth of winter."

"A few miles! I will wager we are more than sixty miles from the ship, and the weather at such a distance may be widely different, though not to such a degree as it appears."

"Then how do you account for it?"

"By cold winds from the north latitude; they have not visited these parts yet, or this verdant beauty would not be here now."

I agreed with him, and was about to ask him what we had better do about getting back to the ship, when a splendid stag bounded across our path.

"Come on, Frank," I cried, as I picked up my gun, and started after the noble animal.

"I'll wait for you," were the last words I heard, faintly, as I disappeared.

My enthusiasm began to cool after a four miles' run through brake and brier, up stubble hills and down rugged slopes. The stag kept on before me at a graceful, steady-going pace, which was very exasperating, as I was puffing and panting, sweating, and out of breath with my exertions to overtake him. The animal kept just comfortably out of shot-range the whole of the time, and did not seem at all afraid of me, but prudently took a cool survey of me. He looked so innocently deceitful, so placid and unconcerned, that I grew wild with aggravation, and made another start and struggle to reach him. He allowed me to get within twenty yards of him, when he turned and took a few graceful bounds which left the whole distance between us. Leaping over a patch of brushwood, and without heeding where I was going, I fell on the other side into a stream of water. When I gained my footing and recovered my gun the stag was gone.

I crawled out of the stream and turned to retrace my steps, cursing my hard fate and the deceitful stag.

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